



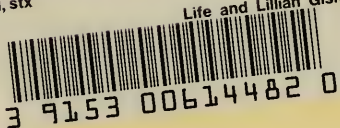
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Life and Lillian Gish



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LIFE AND LILLIAN GISH



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
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MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
OF CANADA, LIMITED  
TORONTO





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"HELENA"

*Life and*  
LILLIAN GISH

---

ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

---

*New York*  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1932



655  
P 5

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"Tranquilly, Lillian Gish sits, dressed in white organdie, her ash blond hair down her back, relaxed on the window seat, looking out for hours into the depths of the California night.

" 'What are you looking at, Lillian?' Mrs. Gish has asked for years.

" 'Nothing, Mother, just looking.' "

ALLENE TALMEY.

"She is an extraordinarily difficult person to know, and if I hadn't gone to live with her . . . and been with her through some of the most trying times of her life, I doubt whether our casual contacts at the studio would have brought me any intimate knowledge of her. There seems to be a wall of reserve between her and the outside world, and very few people ever get through that wall.

"The little things of life simply don't worry her at all. Gales of temperament can rage around her—she remains undisturbed. . . . I have seen her at a time when anyone else would have been distraught with anxiety, come quietly in from the set, eat her luncheon calmly and collectedly (for first of all, Lillian believes in keeping fit for her work), then pick up some little book of philosophy and read it steadily until they sent for her.

"She refuses to believe that there are people in the world who are jealous of her and want to harm her. I remember someone once remarking that a certain person was jealous of her and hated her, and I can still see the look of utter surprise on Lillian's face. But it never made any difference in her treatment of that person. In fact, I doubt whether she remembered it when she met her again.

"She is intensely loyal to those who have helped her along the path of success. She likes to be alone. She has an inexhaustible fund of patience, and a quiet sense of humor."

PHYLLIS MOIR (secretary  
to Lillian, 1925-27)



# CONTENTS

## PART I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A GIRL CHILD, BORN WITH A CAUL	I
II. LIFE AND A LITTLE GIRL	3
III. ON NAT GOODWIN'S SHOULDER	7
IV. "THEATRE PEOPLE"	11
V. A LITTLE TROUPER	16
VI. ADVENTURES OF DOROTHY	27
VII. MARY PICKFORD IN THE SCENE	31
VIII. "DOWN THE LINE"	35
IX. "HER FIRST FALSE STEP"	38
X. DOROTHY'S TREE	50
XI. "SUPPORTING BERNHARDT"	54
XII. MASSILLON DAYS	57
XIII. WHERE THE "ROAD" ENDS. NELL	61
XIV. A CONVENT SCHOOL. TYPHOID	64
XV. SHAWNEE	69
XVI. IT SOUNDS LIKE HEAVEN	75

## PART II

I. "MR. BIOGRAPH"	79
II. GRIFFITH'S GROUP OF PLAYERS	84
III. BELASCO DELIVERS A VERDICT	87

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. A STUDIO ON PICO STREET	92
V. THE PATH TO STARDOM	100
VI. "HOME SWEET HOME"	106
VII. "THE BIRTH OF A NATION"	111
VIII. "INTOLERANCE"	117
IX. THERE WERE NO LOVE AFFAIRS	122
X. THE NIGHTMARE OF WAR	127
XI. UNDER FIRE	130
XII. FRANCE	133
XIII. "HEARTS OF THE WORLD"	137
XIV. "BROKEN BLOSSOMS"	140
XV. "I WORK SUCH LONG HOURS"	146
XVI. DIRECTOR LILLIAN	149
XVII. "WAY DOWN EAST"	156
XVIII. SAD, UNPROFITABLE DAYS	165
XIX. PICTURING THE REIGN OF TERROR	169

## PART III

I. ITALY	175
II. "THE WHITE SISTER"	185
III. "ROMOLA"	194
IV. ALSO, THE INTELLIGENTSIA	205
V. "LA BOHÊME"	210
VI. "THE SCARLET LETTER"	223
VII. "THE FIRST LADY OF THE SCREEN"	233
VIII. "WIND"	237
IX. GOOD-BYE CALIFORNIA	242



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---

Contents

---

---

ix

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. REINHARDT	246
XI. THE SHADOW SPEAKS	253
XII. ON THE FLYING CARPET	257
XIII. "ONE ROMANTIC NIGHT"	260

PART IV

I. "UNCLE VANYA"	265
II. "HELENA" IN NEW YORK	270
III. "THE PENALTY OF GREATNESS"	275
IV. WORKING WITH LILLIAN	282
V. "UNCLE VANYA" TAKES THE ROAD	288
VI. RELIVING THE YEARS	295
VII. A FEW NOTES	300
VIII. L'ENVOI	303



## ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
"Helena"	42
A Scene from "Her First False Step"	48
Lillian and Dorothy Gish	82
David Wark Griffith	112
Lillian and Dorothy, During the Griffith Period	124
Lillian as Elsie Stoneman, in "The Birth of a Nation"	128
Mrs. Gish and "Her Girls," Mary Pickford, Mildred Harris, Dorothy and Lillian	144
Lillian Gish and Richard Barthelmess in "Broken Blossoms"	158
"Anna Moore"	162
The River Scene in "Way Down East"	192
"The White Sister"	202
"Romola"	218
Mimi at the Pawnshop . . . "La Bohême"	230
Miss Gish as Hester Prynne, in "The Scarlet Letter"	240
"Wind." Letty, Burying the Man She Had Killed	262
"The First Lady of the Screen"	298
"Camille"	



## PROLOGUE

(Scene: Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya"—end of second act.

Lillian Gish as Helena)

*First Woman in Front of Me:* "They say she's been playing over twenty-five years."

*Second Woman in Front of Me:* "Goodness! How old is she?"

"The piece I read said about thirty or so . . ."

"Oh, began as a child; is Gish her real name?"

"I believe so; the piece said . . ."

"Do you like these Russian plays?"

"I like *her*, in anything. I *loved* her in 'Broken Blossoms,' though it nearly killed me."

"I wonder why she left the movies."

"Oh, lots of 'em do; the piece said . . ."

"Do you suppose that is all her own hair?"

"Oh, I think so; the piece said . . ."





LIFE AND LILLIAN GISH



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## PART ONE

### I

#### A GIRL CHILD, BORN WITH A CAUL

---

WHEN Lillian was six, she found herself with a company (one night stands, mostly), "trouping" through the Middle West— . . . the golden-haired child actress who supplied the beauty and pathos in a melodrama variously known as "The Red Schoolhouse" and "In Convict Stripes." All of which had come about reasonably enough—as reasonably as anything is likely to happen, in a world where nothing seems at all reasonable until we begin taking it to pieces.

On an evening in October—the 14th, to be exact, 1896—in a very modest dwelling, in Springfield, Ohio, May Gish—Mary Robinson Gish (born McConnell)—waited for her first child. She was barely twenty, and it was hardly more than a year earlier that James Gish, a traveling salesman—young, handsome, winning—had found her at Urbana, and after a whirlwind wooing, had carried her off, a bride, to Springfield.

No one knew very much of Gish. From that mysterious "Dutch" region of Pennsylvania, he had drifted into Springfield, made friends easily, and found work there, with a wholesale grocery. He might be Dutch himself; "Gish" could easily have been "Gisch"; or French—a legend has it that the name had once been "Guise" or "de Guise" . . . all rather indefinite, today.

On the other hand, everybody in Urbana knew about pretty May McConnell, whose Grandfather Robinson had

been in the State Senate; who had a President, Zachary Taylor, and a poetess, Emily Ward, somewhere in her family; whose father was a very respectable dealer in saddlery and harness, with a spirited dapple-grey horse in his big show window.

Oh, well, it is all so "accidental" . . . even though some of us do not believe in accidents, and talk knowingly of a Great Law . . . of a Weaver who sits at the Loom of Circumstance. . . .

Still, it was natural enough that now, within a year from her marriage, pretty May Gish should be looking up from her window at the thronging stars, wondering how a baby soul could find its way among them to her tiny room.

A girl child, born with a caul . . . supposed to mean good fortune, even occult power. Mary Gish did not much concern herself with this superstition; she had been rather strictly raised; when she gave her daughter the name of Lillian, and added Diana—Lillian because she was so fair, and Diana because a big moon looked into her window—she thought it a happy combination and hoped well for it—no more than that.

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## II

### LIFE AND A LITTLE GIRL

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THE little household did not remain in Springfield. At the time of his marriage, or soon after, James Gish gave up his position as a salesman, and opened a small confectionery. Candy-making may have been his trade; at all events, he worked at it now, sometimes leaving "Maysie," as he called her, to tend shop while he went to nearby fairs and celebrations. Had he persevered, he might have done well enough. As it was, when Lillian was about a year old, he gave up Springfield for Dayton, to which prosperous town Father McConnell had already taken his saddlery and harness business, including the smart dapple-grey horse for the show window. Dorothy Gish, who was born in Dayton, still remembers the impressive horse in Grandfather's window. Lillian, a fair, sedate little lass, was delighted when Dorothy arrived—fat, rosy, red-haired—full of fun and mischief, almost from the beginning.

So different, these two. Lillian had been a pensive baby—one to lie quietly, looking at nothing, as one thinking long thoughts—possibly of a pleasanter land, so recently left behind. Dorothy's arms and legs were perpetually in action . . . impossible to keep the covers on her. When she could creep about, then walk, it was necessary to grab quickly for one's possessions.

Lillian had a doll, probably a tidy rag-doll, or a very small china one, and a little rocker, which she sometimes sat in, holding her doll and singing to it. She never really

cared for dolls. Ruddy-haired Dorothy was lovelier than any doll. When Lillian held her, as she did, often, they made a dainty picture: one doll rocking another.

A tragic thing happened. Lillian sat in her chair alone, one day, when a terrible object looked in the window. It was a workman, who had put on a false face, to frighten her. He succeeded. The terrified child screamed and went into spasms. Always, after that, she was subject to nightmares, from which she awoke, screaming. In later years they came during periods of prolonged rehearsal. Usually they took one of two forms: She was in a wood, at evening . . . the trees became sinister, drew their roots from the ground and pursued her. . . . Or in a field, where there were many red poppies . . . large ones . . . the California kind. They became very tall, and threatening, like the trees. . . . They came up and slapped her in the face.

In summer time Mrs. Gish took her little girls to visit her sister Emily, who had married and lived at Massillon, in the eastern part of the state. It was a happy place for children. There was a green dooryard, with chickens, a cat asleep on the porch, a dog—a kindly dog who would not hurt a little girl and her baby sister.

And in the house was a wonderful cupboard, where a number of interesting things were kept, including a bottle of Castoria. Lillian was not meddlesome, but she had a complex for Castoria. She would even dose herself with it surreptitiously. Her aunt put the bottle on an upper shelf, but Lillian with a chair, a high-chair if necessary, would manage to reach it. It became a kind of game. Her aunt took a Castoria bottle and secretly half filled it with cod liver oil, which certainly was not playing the game fairly.

There it stood, in plain view; even a low chair would reach it. A good swallow—saints above! What an explosion, what a spitting, what a grabbing at the poor punished tongue! Lillian was naturally very honest. Castoria had been the one temptation she could not resist. Her character was now perfect.

But she did love baked beans. She could almost never get enough of them. One day—this was in Dayton—her father took her for a walk. The drinking-saloons of Dayton, like those everywhere, had swinging doors, with free lunch inside, spread at the end of the high bar. Gish pushed open a pair of these swinging doors, perched the little girl on the high counter, close to a great platter of beans. A man wearing a white apron handed her a plate and a spoon: "Help yourself," he said. Lillian did not know what became of her father, but by and by Grandfather McConnell appeared, rather frantic, and shocked, and took her away.

One other thing she loved—ice cream—her taste for it amounted to a passion. Her father did not sell it, but there was a place just down the street that did. When in funds, Lillian haunted the ice-cream counter. But one was so liable to be bankrupt. Reflecting on these things, she had a startling idea. One did not need money to buy things! More than once in her father's shop she had seen a customer pick up a package, and with the magic words, "Charge it, please," walk out. Why, of course—she could do that, too. Ten minutes later she was finishing her second dish of vanilla and chocolate mixed.

"Charge it, please."

The young man regarded the slender little vision, who had just stowed away two saucers of his stock in trade.



"You're Mr. Gish's little girl, aren't you?"

"Yes, thank you," said Lillian, who was nothing if not polite.

"Oh, all right."

Such a nice man, to know who she was.

On the way home, she noticed a little green cap in a window—just what she had wanted. . . . She stood on tiptoe, to look over the counter, at the grisly man who sold things.

"I want to buy that little green cap in the window—and charge it, please."

"Oh—why, you're Jim Gish's little girl, ain't you?"

"Yes, thank you."

He held her up to the glass, the tiny cap a green jewel on her crown of gold. And presently at home she was explaining all the wonder of her system to Mama, who also did some explaining, very gently, which put the system in a new light. Lillian was then about three.

---

### III

## ON NAT GOODWIN'S SHOULDER

---

IN the case and circumstance of James Gish, there is an element of mystery. He had the gift of friendship, of popularity, even of prosperity . . . without material increase. It may be that the swinging doors were too handy to his confectionery . . . a spoiled child . . . and heredity is always to be reckoned with. It may be that he was not quite a reality . . . a good many of us are like that. . . . He closed his business in Dayton and removed his family to Baltimore, where he arranged some sort of partnership with a man named Meixner. Did he put up his experience against Meixner's capital? Grandfather McConnell probably helped.

The firm of Gish and Meixner must have prospered, in the beginning. Mary Gish allied herself with the church of her faith, the Episcopal, in which both she and her children had been baptized. Gentle and lovely, she made friends. The children, neatly dressed, went to Sunday School. Mary Gish was one of God's fine souls. She had a beautiful spirit, and she had exquisite taste. Whatever her circumstances—and the time was coming when they would be hard enough—she would manage, through some sacrifice, to get a scrap of dainty material, a bit of real lace, for her children's clothing. Lillian and Dorothy were much noticed—she must not fail them. In her husband's shop, by day and often in the evening, she nevertheless made every garment with her own hands—those tiny, marvelous hands that could draw and embroider, could

put up bonbons, and gift packages, as no one else could do it—mended and laundered and ironed when the others were long abed.

The Gish children found their Sunday School an interesting place. Sometimes there were entertainments, "exhibitions" they called them, and there was an Empty Stocking Club that filled stockings for the less fortunate, at Christmas time. Lillian's first public appearance, at one of the exhibitions, was not an entire success.

She had been chosen to speak a piece, some verses of welcome, which daily she faithfully rehearsed at home, going over them time and again, just as in later years she would prepare for her rôles. Little Dorothy, playing about the room, apparently gave slight attention, perhaps not realizing herself how the lines were being drilled into her brain.

The afternoon of the performance came, and Lillian, all white and gold, rose and spoke the lines faultlessly. There was applause, of course—and something more. Dorothy, shining like a jewel, jumped up and waved her hand to the superintendent:

"May I speak a piece, please—may I speak a piece, too?"

"Why, of course, my dear, you may; come right along."

And Dorothy, fair and undismayed, marched to the platform, and repeated Lillian's poem of welcome, word for word.

Poor Lillian! The audience, at first puzzled, broke into applause. Her heart was broken. She thought she had failed—recited badly. She struggled a little, and found relief in a welter of tears. Which meant grief for Dorothy, who adored Lillian—set her up as a kind of queen.

The Empty Stocking distribution was quite another matter—a real event. It was held at Ford's Theatre, where Nat Goodwin and Maxine Elliot were playing that week, on an afternoon when there was no *matinée*. The big tree was set up in the center of the stage, and the stars were invited to take part. Maxine Elliot offered to fill stockings; Nat Goodwin agreed to be Santa Claus. When a particularly angelic child was needed, to perch on Nat Goodwin's shoulder and distribute the stockings, Lillian Gish was chosen, and so made her first stage appearance—rode into the drama—on the shoulder of one of the best-known actors of the day.

Dorothy and Lillian were near enough together to be playmates. Lillian was not so good at play as Dorothy. Long afterwards she wrote:

"I envy this dear, darling Dorothy with all my heart, for she is the side of me that God left out. . . .

"All my life I have wanted to play happily, as she does, only to find myself bad at playing. As a little girl, I was not much good at playing, and I find that, try as I will, I don't play very convincingly today."

They were good little girls—Lillian especially so. They had been taught to say their prayers, and would as soon have omitted their little nightgowns as their prayers. If Dorothy made a scramble of hers, while Lillian offered her petition to the last word and syllable, and overborne by some ancient melancholy prayed regularly that she might wake up in Heaven, it was only as Nature had intended them to be from the beginning.

Different as they were, then and always, they had one great interest in common: their mother. They thought her

the best and most beautiful person in the world. Dorothy loved to think that she looked like her, and cried when told that Lillian "looked more like Mama" than she did.

From the beginning, almost, Lillian was inclined to be orderly, tidy. Dorothy—well, Dorothy was different. Even in that early day, when Lillian was no more than five, she carefully removed her clothes and laid them neatly together. Dorothy did not remove hers. She dropped, or flung, them off, and where they fell they remained. It was said—this was much later—that you could at any time find Dorothy by following her clothes.

By day, Lillian was inclined to sit in her little chair and reflect, while Dorothy tore about the house, escaping to the street if not watched, and perpetually had her knees bruised and scratched, from falls. She also liked to sample any food or liquids that were in handy reach, and once went on a genuine debauch. Lillian had come down with an attack of croup, her medicine being a tasty toddy, which, upon experiment, Dorothy found that she liked. Lillian was dozing, and she continued her experiment. Then she laid aside the spoon and picked up the glass. Her mother found her, staggering down the hall, "making whoopee." Mary Gish got a whiff of her breath, and sent for the doctor. Next day Dorothy went through the tortures that go with a bandaged head, and usually come later in life.

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## IV

### “THEATRE PEOPLE”

---

THE world was not kind to James Gish. Perhaps those wise ones who know all about the world, and human nature, and the free-will to choose, will say that he was not kind to himself. One must admire those people; they know things with such a deadly certainty. I never in my life knew a thing so certainly as a man who once told me that I could always do the right thing, if I only wanted to. Apparently I didn't want to.

Nor, as it seemed, did James Gish. When, after less than two years in Baltimore, he sold out to Meixner, he had very little left. Part of that little he gave to his wife; with the rest, he went to New York, where he would find employment and send remittances.

For a time the remittances came; then they dwindled, skipped, ceased. Mrs. Gish worked, but the money she earned was not enough for the little family. Meixner lent her small sums, then advised her to join her husband, advancing money for her fare and for immediate needs on arrival. Meixner appears to have been a good soul.

In New York, Mary Gish took an apartment—small, but large enough to accommodate two boarders. It faced West 39th Street, up one or two flights of stairs. She needed more furniture and bought it on instalments. She also took a job—demonstrating, in a Brooklyn department store. She was twenty-five, handsome, capable, determined to make her way. Up at five, she set her house in order,



got breakfast for her family and the two boarders—theatrical women, who had their luncheons outside. Leaving the children in the hands of a colored girl, she was off for the day. Back at night, she got the supper; then worked at the making and mending and laundering of the family clothing.

Gish was there, and may have been employed at times, but his help was negligible. Less than that. As she saved from her modest pay, she gave him sums, trusting soul, to pay on her furniture. But then, one day, when she came home from her job in distant Brooklyn, more distant than now, the dealers who had sold it to her had come and taken it away. Her husband appears to have vanished about the same time. Later, she sought and obtained legal separation.

Kind-hearted, weak—James Gish was only one of thousands. That he loved his family is certain. When a year or two later, Mary Gish and little Dorothy were on a theatrical circuit, he was likely to turn up any time, appearing mysteriously in distant places. Hungry for the sight of them, he must have watched them enter and leave the theatre—perhaps went in to see the play. Sometimes he confronted them on a street in a far-off town. Always in Mary Gish's heart was the dread that he would take one or both of her children from her. She knew he was a Freemason, and in her lack of knowledge, thought he might in some way invoke that secret agency. He seems never to have attempted anything of the sort, and if he secretly followed Lillian, she did not know it. Probably it was Mary Gish herself that he most wanted to see. Those wise ones who know all about the world will not fail to explain that he deserved his tragedy. . . .

Night and day the Loom of Circumstance weaves its inevitable pattern. The filaments proceed from a million sources, stretching backward through eternity. Incredibly they unite, and once united the gods themselves cannot change the design.

Mary Gish's fortunes were at low ebb. Her unfurnished room would presently be on her hands. The two actresses, who owed her money, were willing to bunk on the floor, but the theatrical season would open shortly, and what then? Such jewelry as she owned was pawned, even to the last piece—even to her wedding ring. The actresses had likewise parted with their valuables. One of them, who called herself Dolores Lorne, had taken a great fancy to little Dorothy. There came a momentous afternoon. Mary Gish, arriving from Brooklyn, was met by a startling proposal:

"I can get a good part in Rebecca Warren's 'East Lynne' Company," Dolores Lorne excitedly announced, "if I can get a child to play 'Little Willie.' Dorothy would do it, exactly. They will pay her fifteen dollars a week, and we'd have a week's salary in advance. I could pay you; and I know a woman who can get a part for Lillian, too. A lovely woman, Alice Niles, in a 'Convict Stripes' Company."

Mary Gish stared at her, dazed, staggered. She could not grasp it. Her little girls . . . going away . . . motherless. . . . Poor little Dot, hardly more than a baby . . . and Lillian, barely six . . . on the road with theatre people . . . what would the folks at home say?

Theatre people! She had not even dared to confess that she had them in her house. Dolores was a good soul . . . but little Dot . . . and Alice Niles—who *was* Alice Niles?



A stranger! And Lillian, so frail . . . on the road . . . with a stranger!!! James Gish's wife, who had borne up in the face of everything, gave way, wept as if her heart would break.

Dolores Lorne comforted her . . . later, Alice Niles. She believed them good women, both of them. They promised to take a mother's care of her little girls. They painted life on the circuit as happy—just a long pleasure trip. If they forgot the broken nights on wretched trains, the scanty, stale food, the dragging weariness of delays . . . oh, well, they were human. Lillian and Dorothy became excited. They had never been to a theatre, except to the Christmas-tree performance in Baltimore. That had been beautiful. Especially Maxine Elliot. Now, they were going to be beautiful, like Maxine. Tearfully Mary Gish began to assemble two little wardrobes—scanty little wardrobes, of a size to go into two cheap little telescope bags.

Also, there were the rehearsals. Mary Gish taught her children their brief lines, which they rehearsed at the theatre. Lillian went at her task in her obedient, thorough way, and became a favorite. Dorothy, who perhaps had ideas of her own, was invited to repeat, and repeat, until both Mr. William Dean, the kindly manager of her company, and herself, were a trifle worn and critical. Finally, when Mr. Dean became really quite fierce, and peremptory, Dorothy, aged four, whispered, her lips trembling a little:

“Please, Mr. Dean, if you let me alone for a few minutes, I *know* I'll be able to do it.”

Mrs. Gish, meantime, had a new and quite definite plan. She would herself become an actress! Very likely her peo-

ple would cast her out, but never mind. Acting could not be worse than the long hours in Brooklyn. She would equip herself to be with one or both of her children. Alice Niles introduced her at a theatrical agency, and Mary Gish—determined woman that she was—was rehearsing for a small part at Proctor's almost as soon as the two real actresses of the family had said their heartbreaking good-byes.

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## V

### A LITTLE TROUPER

---

STAGE children of that day took whatever name was offered them, usually the name of the woman in whose charge they traveled. Dorothy readily learned to say "Aunt Dolores" and accepted the name of Lorne. Alice Niles became "Aunt Alice" to Lillian, and she herself "Florence Niles."

It is not certain where Dorothy's company opened, but "In Convict Stripes," with "Little Florence Niles, the loveliest and most gifted child actress on the American stage," opened at Risingsun, Ohio, in a barn. Barns and upstairs halls were often used by the one-night-stand companies, though a larger town sometimes had an "opera house," with real seats, not just boards for benches.

Risingsun was accounted a very good town of the barn-and-board-seat variety. It had a stage with side slips, and something in the nature of scenic effects. After a long night ride on the train—a night when one did not undress and go properly to bed, but slept part of the time on a seat, part of the time leaning against Aunt Alice—a journey which was not altogether a pleasure trip—the "Convict Stripes" Company arrived at Risingsun in time for a rehearsal before the performance.

There was a stone quarry in the play, and some papier maché rocks, probably carried by the company. At the climax of the third act, the villain—there was always a villain—places the child at the bottom of the stone quarry, then lights a fuse to explode a charge of dynamite which

will hurl rocks, and the poor innocent child, into the air. Is the child killed? Dear, no! In the nick of time, the hero swings out upon a rope, swoops down into the pit, seizes the child and swings himself and his precious charge to safety, just as the dynamite explodes.

Inasmuch as a delicate, real flesh-and-blood, child might not stand the wear of being handled in that reckless way, a neatly made dummy-duplicate of Lillian was placed in the pit for the hero to grab. Lillian had been carefully taught to creep to safe hiding behind some of the papier maché rocks before the explosion, and knew just how to do it. They practiced now on the barn stage, and it went off perfectly. They forgot one thing, however: They forgot to tell the "lovely and gifted Florence Niles" that the explosion would make a sudden and very big noise. In the rehearsals, somebody had merely said "BOOM," which wasn't at all the same thing.

Evening came, and the big barn was filled with farmers and townspeople, a breathless audience. Florence Niles, aged six, lay safely behind a stout papier maché rock, waiting for somebody to say "Boom!" But then, just at the instant when the villain or somebody *should* have said "Boom!" something else, something very terrific and awful, happened: a real *BOOM* in fact—one that fairly shook the barn, and made the audience jump and say something. The gifted Florence Niles did not stop to see what became of her double, but with a shriek, shot out from behind the rock and across the stage as fast as her legs could carry her, while the audience shouted for joy.

Never again would the climax go off as well as that. When the curtain fell, and Lillian—that is to say, Florence

Niles—on the hero's shoulder, passed in the procession before it, they received a great ovation.

And this was not so far from that modest house in Springfield, Ohio, where just six years earlier Mary Gish had waited for her first-born.

I do not know what the next stop was, and it does not matter, any more. The family likeness among one-night-stands was strong. The child actress presently did not mind the explosion—not so much—she only stopped her ears for it, and always she took the curtain call on the shoulder of the big hero, who adored her, and would have swung, regardless of explosions, into any quarry, any time, night or day, to save her.

How kind they were, all of them! Aunt Alice especially. She had a round, smiling face, and a round, soft, motherly body. Just right for the character part she played . . . just right for a little girl to snuggle up to, those nights on the train when there was no empty seat where one could really stretch out and sleep. Any of the company would gladly have given a shoulder to that golden head, and did, in turn, but no one except Aunt Alice had such a nice, soft shoulder, with such a good smell—no tobacco or anything—just Aunt Alice.

But the nights were quite hard, sometimes:—hard . . . and strange. Even when she got a seat all to herself and was covered by somebody's coat, and sound asleep, it did not last. At any station a crowd of noisy people might come in, and a fat woman, or a thin woman with a baby, or somebody, would need the seat; and struggling to get her eyes open, and almost dead, Lillian would shrink back into her corner, and start at the

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rest of the company, huddled into the unusual attitudes of sleep.

The train did queer things to people. Such remarkable people . . . when one was awake to notice. Men—women, too—with funny faces. Country-jakes and their girls. Boys who stared at her, and if she turned on them suddenly, acted so crazily . . . babies—that mostly cried . . . fat people . . . thin people . . . dirty people . . . even clean and pretty ones.

Sometimes faces and people were there very uncertainly—perhaps not really there at all—just a part of some dream. One dreamed and dreamed, especially if one was not very well. Sometimes she woke with a dry, feverish mouth, and staggered down the aisle for a drink. Sometimes she was awakened by being bumped and jerked, this way and that, switching, with engine bells that swept by with a watery sound.

Faces . . . faces—one could even invent faces, especially just as one was going to sleep . . . or they just came of themselves . . . like the train boy, who brought a strong smell of oranges. Sometimes Aunt Alice would let her buy one, and a lemon stick to push into it. That was heaven. One could suck the lemon stick and dig into one's corner and go to sleep. Or press one's cheek against the glass and watch the snow or rain or solid dark go by, with sometimes a light . . . far off, or perhaps quite near. Somebody would be where the light was—somebody lived there. On clear nights there were stars—even a moon that made the snow fields very white, and traveled with the train, no matter how fast or far it went.

So much snow: fields of snow, hills of snow; villages with snow on the roofs, and in the dooryards, looking



white and deserted in the moonlight. And tunnels—long, terrible, gasping tunnels; and big towns where the train slowed down with a great clackety-clack of wheels, and there was confusion—shouting, and rumbling baggage trucks, and where probably one had to change and sit in a station, or work one's way through the iron arms that divided up the seats, so one could stretch out, and really sleep a little, at last. Not long, of course, for the other train would soon come shrieking in, and Aunt Alice or the hero, or Corinne, the soubrette, or somebody, would drag her through the iron divisions, and maybe carry her onto it, and if she didn't remember that she had gone to bed before, she was apt to say her "Now I lay me" over again, and "God bless Mama and Dorothy, and keep them safe and well, and please, God, let me wake up in Heaven," which she always added. And then, if there were no more changes that night, almost right away it was morning, with coal-dust, and cinders, and gray outside at first . . . with perhaps a streaky sky . . . or dull and drowned with rain . . . or caught up in a whirl of snow; and the train boy came through and sold her a sandwich for breakfast; or maybe they had reached the next show-town, and she went scurrying down the platform, holding Aunt Alice's hand and lugging the little telescope bag, to a lunch counter where there might be something warm. . . . Not really a "pleasure excursion," but long afterwards she did not regret it—she even found something "rather beautiful" in it.

They did not really "put up" at hotels. They merely "put in," at a cheap one, for the day. Aunt Alice would get a room for fifty cents, until theatre time. Then the

two soubrettes—good-hearted, even if rather tough, girls—would come to “call,” to share the room, each paying ten or fifteen cents. All stretched out on the bed, the sofa, anywhere, to catch up with their sleep. They only got up to eat—something they brought in, or at a restaurant, a cheap one (oh, worse in that day than now!)—or for a *matinée*.

If they were awake and there was nothing else to do, Aunt Alice taught her charge from a little book, and told her about a number of useful things. For one thing, it was quite wrong, Aunt Alice said, to kill animals, and not really healthy to eat their flesh. Vegetables, bread, milk and eggs had in them all that was good for human beings. Aunt Alice was a vegetarian, and advised Lillian to become one. Lillian liked the sound and size of the word, and could not bear the thought of killing anything—animals especially. Besides, at the places they ate, one could get more vegetables than meat for one’s money. One could get quite a lot of potatoes for a nickel, or a dime; other things, too—baked beans, which she still loved, and rice. They were not always good—sometimes greasy and tasteless, but they filled up. Often the butter was bad, especially. Still, if one could have a piece of pie at the end . . . or a plate of ice cream—a five cent plate . . . she became a vegetarian.

All the actors paid their own expenses, except train fares. Unlike Dorothy, Lillian received only ten dollars a week, but by close economy could send more than half of it to her mother. Perhaps the economy was too close, the physical foundation she was laying too slender.

And there was more than the need of food and sleep. A child—the wistful, heart-hungry child that she was—



needed more than even the kind-hearted care of Aunt Alice: . . . Companions, play . . . the comfort of a mother's arms. . . . Darkness gathering in a lonely hotel room—a little figure crouching at the window, staring into the night.

“What are you looking at, dear?”

“Nothing, Aunt Alice—just looking.”

Always her reply would be the same—always the same heart-hunger behind it. A dozen, twenty years later, a slender, white figure on a window seat, staring into the depths of the California night.

“What are you looking at, Lillian?” her mother asks.

“Nothing, Mother; just looking.”

Sometimes when the town was quite large and they played more than one night, she got to sleep in a real bed, could take off her clothes and have a bath—how splendid! Sometimes the paper in such a town had a piece in it about the play, even once or twice with her picture. The others thought this very fine, especially where their names were mentioned. They bought a lot of the papers, and cut out the pieces. Lillian did not value the notices very highly; what the paper said was not always true. The picture was of the same sad-faced little girl she saw every morning in the glass when Aunt Alice combed her hair. When one of the company gave her a clipping for herself, she politely said “Thank you,” and put it away in her little telescope, but she seldom looked at it.

One performance was like another; but then came one which brought her a special and rather wide publicity. In the play was a prison scene, where a guard, a lame guard, Cliff Dean, carried a rifle, loaded with a blank cartridge.

During the performance at Fort Wayne, Indiana, the unfortunate guard dropped his gun, and it went off. Lillian, close by, received the charge in her leg, and was badly powder-burned. No burn hurts worse than that. She screamed and ran off the stage. The leading man, the hero, was going down some steps that led to the dressing-rooms. He picked her up and carried her down, soothing and comforting her. Others not in the scene gathered to help. The wounded leg was bathed and bandaged. The play upstairs did not stop. The audience may have thought the incident just a part of it.

The next act was the last one, and Lillian's share in it important. She was suffering terribly, but she said she would go on, and did. Few, if any, of the spectators knew what had happened. When, after the show, the facts were known, they crowded the lobby of the hotel and watched the doctor pick the powder grains out of the tender flesh. It was torture, but Florence Niles, the child actress, refused to cry. Some of the powder had to stay under the skin and remain there permanently, like tattoo.

Alice Niles did not write to Mary Gish of the accident, but of course it got into the Western papers. Grandfather McConnell, in Dayton, saw it, and sent her a clipping. Certain of the family may have regarded it as a kind of retribution for permitting one of her own to follow such a calling. The biblical-minded can always identify punishment, even when it falls on the innocent child, or flocks, of the transgressor. The fact that her children and herself had become play-actors was for years not mentioned by Mary Gish's family to their friends—nor discussed among themselves.

The company did not perform on Sundays—nor always

travel—but stayed in a hotel room; shabby, but how luxurious! Aunt Alice mended their clothes—washed them. Florence Niles, the child actress, helped. All the others were doing the same. Sometimes they dropped in, to visit. Among them they taught her to read. The patter of the stage and much general information she picked up unconsciously. Nothing that was evil—certainly nothing that she recognized as such—neither then nor ever. More than twenty years later she wrote:

Stage children are in most cases more sheltered than those who go to school. They constantly associate with older people who are, as a rule, most careful what they say in front of them.

In after years, she remembered that once a stage hand had knocked another one down because he swore in front of her. Some of the company may have been a bit dissipated, even dissolute; if so, it was outside of her knowledge. There would come a day when she would realize that the soubrettes probably had been as “tough” off as on the stage—that some of the others were not saints. But to her, then, they were, and in her memory would always remain, the best people in the world.

And talented; they said so themselves. All, including Lillian, looked forward to playing New York. The others because it might mean a Broadway engagement where their talents would be appreciated. Lillian, because New York would mean her mother . . . better meals . . . a bed to sleep in at night. Considerately, she did not mention these things, but looked out of the window, thinking long thoughts. And this picture I am trying to present is not only of that first year, but of the years that followed it, one so nearly like another—except for the parts she took

and the rapidly increasing length of her slim legs—that in later years she found it by no means easy to distinguish them.

Two events remembered from that first far-off engagement were particularly tragic, both connected with running for trains. Always they seemed to have been running for trains. Every night after the performance there was the same scramble, even though they had to wait for hours in a station that was too hot or too cold, with only those divided benches to sleep on, or the telegraph desk, when the station agent took pity on a tired little theatre-girl.

And often it seemed to be raining, or snowing, when they started for the train, and there were single-board-crossings over the ditches, where you could not hold to Aunt Alice's hand and stay under her umbrella, and where it was not easy for someone to pick you up, because all the talented company carried their baggage, every fellow for himself.

So it happened that on one of those rainy nights, when she was running behind Aunt Alice, across a narrow foot-bridge, lugging her little telescope bag—there, right in the middle of the bridge—the treacherous strap gave way, and all her possessions—her little nightgown, her little extra stockings and underwears, her press-clippings, everything—disappeared in the black, rushing torrent below. She did not stop—no time for that, and no use, anyway—but raced on after Aunt Alice, holding fast to the useless little strap of the telescope, and crying—oh, crying. No money to send home that week—so many things to buy.

The other event, scarcely less tragic, was also of the night and rain. She was wearing the little white furs that once an uncle had bought for her, and that she so dearly

loved. All about were mud puddles, and by some misstep she plunged into one, and the precious furs could never be the same again. Rain! Rain! Once in the South, on the Seaboard Air Line, it fairly poured, and the rickety old day-coach leaked. The whole company had to sit holding umbrellas, to keep from getting soaked. Lillian always remembered that, as something different.

Christmas that year she remembered, too. A little present had come from Mother—very precious—but there was still more to this Christmas than that—a good deal more. All day they were on a freight train, a train that lumbered and bumped along, and stopped for what seemed hours in the towns, and ran up and down, pulling and pushing all kinds of freight cars, in and out and around, sometimes slamming them into your part of the train, until it seemed your head must certainly come off. You had to ride in the caboose, not at all a nice place—just long, dirty benches on the side, and grimy train men coming in, leaving the doors open, to let in the cold.

But then came a stop at quite a big town, where there was certain to be a lot of switching and backing, which would take a good while. A good many of the company “went ashore,” and when by and by they came back they brought, of all things, a Christmas Tree! A little, green tree that they set up right in the old, dingy caboose; and then they opened packages and hung balls and candy canes on the little tree, and even presents. And all the rest of that day, the gay little tree rode and rode, and the old caboose wasn’t dingy any more, and one’s heart could almost break with happiness over a thing like that. Surely in all the world there was never such another Christmas Tree!

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## VI

### ADVENTURES OF DOROTHY

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IF Dorothy had a Tree that Christmas, there is no memory of it today. A very remarkable one was on its way to her, a little farther down the years, but "Little Willie of East Lynne" appears to have had other entertainments.

Life in Rebecca Warren's "East Lynne" Company was probably less strenuous than in a "Convict Stripes" combination. They made larger towns, had fewer one-night stands. Sleep and food could be more regularly counted upon, and may easily have been of a better quality. Besides, Dorothy—light of heart, plump, dimpled—was fairly worshiped by Dolores Lorne, who lay awake nights planning how she might keep her always, and asked nothing better than to hold her and carry her and shield her from every possible trial of the road. She even planned to steal her, and might have done so, had she not been a devout Catholic.

She was rather rigid in the matter of Dorothy's conduct. She took her to early Sunday morning Mass, and taught her to tell her beads, to pray with a rosary. It was something new, and Dorothy rather liked it. Especially as Aunt Dolores often had candy in her pockets. She was willing to adopt any new and profitable faith. She became a "rice Christian."

Auntie Dolores could be severe. Dorothy had a queer habit of picking the stitching out of the hem of her dress. Miss Lorne had tried all sorts of ways to correct this, for



it meant that she must sit down and restitch the little garment, by hand. Finally, she said:

"You know, Dorothy, you don't like to wear the little trousers that go with your part."

Dorothy didn't. She hated them, and said so. She cried every night, when she had to put them on. Aunt Dolores regarded her very solemnly.

"Very well," she said, "the next time you pick out the seam of your dress, you will have to wear the little trousers to the hotel."

Dorothy didn't believe her. A grown person couldn't do a thing like that to a child—especially Aunt Dolores, who loved her so.

She did, though. Dorothy picked out the hem again, and that night when the play ended, the little trousers were not taken off. She wept, but it was of no use. Auntie Dolores hardened her heart. Dorothy set out for the hotel in the hated trousers. Her little coat nearly concealed them, and she scrooched as much as possible, but the disgrace was there—she could not forget it. It was a terrible punishment, but effective. Dorothy did not pick out the seam again.

One more correction she remembered in after years. The Company had reached Cleveland, where Miss Lorne had relatives. They stayed with them, and somebody made a pudding—a wonderful pudding, with raisins on the top. It was set out on the back porch, to cool. Dorothy, playing out there, found it interesting. Then fascinating. Then she picked off a raisin. Then all the raisins. Then Auntie Dolores came out and asked for an explanation.

Dorothy shook her head: She had seen some blackbirds about the yard . . . perhaps they had picked off the

raisins. "Perhaps," agreed Aunt Dolores. There was a raisin in the ruffle of Dorothy's little dress. Perhaps the black-birds had left it there.

Aunt Dolores took Dorothy on her knee and explained in good, Catholic fashion what happened to little girls who did such things, and then told stories about it. Presently reduced to a feshet of tears, Dorothy confessed. She was forgiven; but Auntie Dolores found it necessary to wash out her mouth, with soap.

Dorothy as a "baby star" had been a success. It is true that her attention sometimes wandered during a rather long speech, when she was supposed to be listening, and Miss Warren devised a plan, something with a jelly-bean in it, plainly visible to Dorothy, who knew if she looked at it steadily, it would be slipped to her when the speech ended. Also, there had been a night that she went to sleep, when she was supposed only to be dead, and rolled off the narrow, improvised couch, nearly breaking up the performance.

Dorothy's first season closed rather late, when Lillian was already with her mother, in New York. A telegram came that Dorothy, in care of the Pullman conductor, was on her way to them. Mrs. Gish, anxious at the thought of the little girl traveling alone, wild to see her, was at the station long before train time. With Lillian she waited . . . then at last the train was there, and looking down the platform, they saw Dorothy—not walking in charge of the conductor, but riding high on the shoulder of a very large man, one of a delegation of Elks, who had been captured by the child actress with sunlit, red-gold hair. They had heaped riches upon her—her arms were full. A



moment later, and her mother and Lillian had her in their embrace.

“Oh, Dorothy,” said Lillian, “I’m a vegetarian!”

“That’s nothing,” said Dorothy, “I’m a Roman Catholic!”

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## VII

### MARY PICKFORD IN THE SCENE

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At the apartment, Dorothy found her family considerably increased. A very nice lady was there, also two girls, somewhat older than herself, named Gladys and Lottie, and a boy about her own age, named Jack, who fell in love with her at sight. Their names were Smith, some day to become Pickford, which is a later story.

It had come about in this wise: Lillian's Aunt Alice Niles had severed her engagement with the "Convict Stripes" Company, and had written to say that she would leave it at Buffalo, and come to New York. The season was not ended, but Mrs. Gish, not wishing to leave Lillian with a stranger, wired Miss Niles to bring her in. The manager of the company, remembering that young Gladys Smith had played the part in Toronto, where the play had been called "The Little Red Schoolhouse," promptly arranged to have Gladys join the company in Buffalo. Mrs. Smith decided to bring all the children to Buffalo, and after getting Gladys established, to keep on with the other two, to New York.

The meeting between the two little girls, destined to become world stars, was neither formal nor memorable. More than twenty years later, in an article in *Photoplay*, Mary Pickford wrote:

Neither of us, I am sure, remembers our first meeting. We were too young to be impressed by the event. I do recall a fleeting glimpse of Lillian when I went to Buffalo from Toronto to take the part of little Mabel Payne that she had been playing

in Hal Reid's famous old melodrama, "The Little Red Schoolhouse." Lillian was just leaving the theatre as I came in, and we waved. She could not stop to talk, because she was being whisked away to catch a train for New York.

Lillian and Mary! How little either of them guessed, that day, that within no more than a dozen years, the names and faces of those little yellow-haired, waving girls would be familiar, and beloved, in the world's far corners.

Alice Niles and Lillian rode with Mrs. Smith and Lottie and Jack to New York. Lillian's mother, at the train to meet her, took them all to her apartment, established Mrs. Smith and her children there for as long as they would stay—a kindness which Mrs. Smith, a stranger in New York, never forgot. Mrs. Gish, by this time quite a professional, also introduced her to theatrical agencies, with a view to future engagements. In a word, they joined forces. And thus began an association which was to last many years, and become historic in the theatrical world.

Whether Lillian went out again that season may only be surmised. At some time in the days of her beginning, she had a "Little Willie" part in another "East Lynne" Company—Mabel Pennock's, and long preserved the little trousers she wore. It was a brief engagement, and she had no clear picture of it, later. She seems to remember that, like Dorothy, she went to sleep one night and rolled off the little bench during Madame Vine's long scene, but this is most likely a confusion. Lillian would be too conscientious and well-trained to do a thing like that, even in her sleep.

The end of the dramatic season found two mothers, four girls and a boy in the Gish flat, a combination that at times could produce something resembling a riot. They

were a happy family. They went in for two things: peace, and economy. Lillian's influence had much to do with the former—her unearthly beauty and gentleness. Mrs. Smith told her children that she looked "like an angel dropped out of Heaven," and with the old Irish superstition that the good die young, they expected any moment to see a long arm reach out of the sky and take her home. Gladys, especially, refused to be left entirely alone with her, fearing it might happen at such a time. Certainly she was not always melancholy. Life was a serious matter—from the beginning, apparently, she had known that; also, that Heaven was indeed a desirable place to go to—to wake up in, some morning, quite soon. Yet she enjoyed the company of the others, especially when they went on little excursions. Once at least, they all went to the theatre. Mary, in her article, tells of this:

What fun we youngsters had! Never will I forget the day we went to the American Theatre on Eighth Avenue near 42nd Street. At that time, the American was one of the important legitimate theatres. Now it is a picture house, I think. A Shakesperian play was on; I cannot recall its name, but it seems to me that it was "King Lear." At any rate, it was very heavy and tragic, and we all sat in a row, looking very important and pretending to understand every word. I remember how I went up to the manager in a very sober and dignified manner, and presented my card, saying: "Do you recognize the profession?" There we were, five of us—Lillian, Dorothy, Lottie, Jack and I—and to the manager we must have looked very much like the family of the old Mother Goose lady who lived in the shoe. He smiled amusedly, and assured us that he most certainly did recognize the profession, adding: "Have you got ten cents apiece for the Actors' Fund?"

This threw us into a near panic, for a hasty survey of our

resources disclosed that among all of us we had only eight pennies and one had a hole in it. The manager, however, finally relented and passed us in, telling us that we could give him the money for the Actors' Fund some other time. What a task it was to pay that debt! For weeks and weeks, it seemed, we were running to that box office every time we had saved a few pennies.

The combined housekeeping made for economy, and here, too, Gladys Smith was a leader and a force. Even the mothers listened to her advice. On the kitchen table, at night, with a grubby little pencil and a scrap of paper, she audited the accounts.

Those were very meagre, but really very happy, days. When Mrs. Smith was called to Toronto by her mother's failing health, Mary remained undisputed head of the Smith family, and dealt out counsel, rewards, even punishments, with a fair but firm hand.

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## VIII

### "DOWN THE LINE"

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WITH money saved from her own and the children's earnings, Mary Gish opened a candy and popcorn stand at the Fort George amusement grounds. Her six or seven years of candy making and business experience came in very handy, now. She hired an assistant—one strong enough to pull the taffy she made—Don, a handsome, good-hearted boy, with whom Dorothy fell desperately in love. It was a joy to Dorothy to stand on the counter or on a chair and "ballyhoo" for Don's taffy and popcorn. "This way for the best taffy and popcorn in New York! This way, this way!" Lillian would do it, too, but from a sense of duty, and much less riotously. Mary Pickford recently said:

"I can still hear Lillian's timid little voice saying: 'Would you like to buy some popcorn!'"

To the Smith (Pickford) family, Mrs. Gish's stand at Fort George was in the nature of a diversion. Often in high season, they went up there, to help. In the early morning, the two families rode up together on the street-car, the two younger ones discussing their rights to the "outside seat." Jack was dead in love with Dorothy, but there is a limit to love's sacrifice.

Arriving at Fort George, everybody helped. The corn had to be popped and put in bags; the candy had to be wrapped in paraffined paper, a good deal of a chore. Mrs. Gish let them eat what candy they wanted, and in the beginning their by-word was "Wrap one and eat two."

Then presently they were just wrapping, for the charm of a candy diet is fleeting. There was a place "down the line" where one got marvelous German-fried-potatoes, at a nickel a dish. About noon, armed with a nickel apiece, they went down there. Those heavenly fried potatoes! If one might only get a job with the potato man. Or the milk-shake man . . .

An interesting place, the "line": Stands of several sorts; a variety of shows, and a merry-go-round. The children found it fascinating. There was a place where they had ponies, and the man there on slack days let Lillian and Dorothy ride. They learned quickly, and went tearing up and down, their astonishing hair flying out behind. They really rode like mad—good training for those "picture" days ahead, when as Indians, or cowboys, they would go racing among the hills behind Los Angeles. The pony man declared that they rode like monkeys, and the lovely spectacle they made undoubtedly brought him business.

Dorothy came to grief. One day her pony swerved, or stopped, or something, and Dorothy didn't. So she broke her arm, a thing so terrifying to Lillian that she scrambled quickly from her horse and hid behind the merry-go-round. The alarm reached the Gish taffy stand, and Dorothy's beloved Don came on a dead run and bore her in his arms to her mother. Don, so noble and brave and beautiful—how heavenly—worth breaking one's arm for. Then there was the ride to the hospital in the clanging ambulance, with everybody getting out of the way!

Nobody seems to have thought of Lillian; yet she needed comfort almost as much as Dorothy. Often she fainted at the sight of suffering. If anything was to be done that meant physical pain, like the drawing of a tooth, she was



promptly sent from the room. Even then, the knowledge of the fact was almost too much for her.

She was more self-contained than Dorothy, who would do almost anything on the spur of the moment. One day at the apartment, two girls came along below the window, where Lillian and Dorothy looked out.

"Come down to us," one of the girls called, holding out her arms—"Jump!"

And though the distance was several feet, Dorothy was ready to do that—the girl who called was so beautiful. Her name was Evelyn Nesbit.

There was not much time for cooking in the Gish flat, and anyway the weather was hot—too hot to bend over the kitchen stove after a day on the "line." The younger members, the five of them, would go out foraging for cool things.

We used to love to buy our dinner in the delicatessen shops [Mary Pickford writes]. The five of us would troop in and order pickles and turkey to take home.

One can imagine that little row of future stars ranged along the fat delicatessen man's showcase, coveting all the good things in it, agreeing at last on a modest purchase of pickles and turkey. Any one of them could have eaten every bit of it. Sometimes they extended themselves on a bit of dessert—ice-cream, *always*—who does not love ice-cream? They had an ice-cream complex. If they were in funds, they bought a little dab to take home, and had their own dessert in advance—ice-cream soda. The Greeks over there sold ice-cream soda for five cents. When, one day, they raised it to ten, it was the end of the world.



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## IX

### “HER FIRST FALSE STEP”

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NONE of these children can be said to have had any real childhood. Those summers together (there appear to have been two of them) provided about all they ever had in the way of playmates of their own age. The opening of each amusement season found them back on the road, trouping, with grown-up players as companions. Naturally, they did not go to school—not during those earlier years—but picked up such rudiments of instruction as it was possible to acquire in stuffy, badly-lighted, dressing rooms, in jolting day coaches and in casual nooks and corners of the world's worst hotels. I cannot speak for the others, but I am sure that Lillian and Dorothy had very little in the way of regular schooling until they were in, or near, their 'teens. Had it been otherwise, they would have been quite certain, I think, to remember.

It was during this period that the Gerry Society became their bogey man. They did not know what it was, but only that it was something likely to grab them in any strange city, in a dark hall or alley, as they entered or left the theatre. It would take them out of the theatre, they were told, so they would not be able to earn money any more, and maybe put them into an “Institution,” which was a terrible sounding word. To Mary Gish it was a very real menace, for she knew that she would have hard work convincing the Gerry officers that her children were getting proper care and education, playing six nights and two matinées a week, sleeping and eating in that sketchy fash-

ion of the road. They did not linger on the street, they did not show themselves more than necessary, especially in the larger towns. Lillian, many years later, wrote:

Before I could understand what it was all about, I knew of subterfuges and evasions and tremendous plottings to keep myself and my sister acting, so that the very necessary money might be earned. . . .

Their safety lay in their obscurity. Had they been with important companies, playing finer theatres, they would hardly have escaped.

The season of 1903-4 remains to Lillian and Dorothy the most memorable—for a very good reason: they were together, and their mother was with them. For the time, at least, Mary Gish's dream had come true: she had secured parts for her little girls and herself in the same company. Her own part and Dorothy's were small, but would more than pay expenses. Dorothy was a news-girl, who sold "Evenin' pipers!" Lillian's part was a very good one; their combined salaries were forty-five dollars per week!

The play was "Her First False Step," another fierce melodrama; only, in this one, Lillian, instead of being nearly blown up was within an ace of being devoured by savage African lions, being rescued by the brave hero, barely in the nick of time!

There were two of the lions, and they were really savage, for later when they were sold to a circus, one of them tore out a keeper's arm. There was a provision, however, against accidents: The lions were in a cage in which there was a sliding division, so cunningly arranged that even those who sat in the front rows could not see it. At the instant when the noble hero leaps into the cage and

drags out the little victim—child of the woman he loves—while every eye is riveted on this deed of daring, the invisible partition is drawn back from behind, the lions rush in, roaring and leaping about, wild at being deprived of their prey, for at that very instant, too, the cage door is slammed shut. It was truly a terrible spectacle. Women in the audience sometimes fainted.

» "THE BIG SHOW" »

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**"HER FIRST  
FALSE STEP."**

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**A Play For All the People.  
First Time Here.  
30 People in the Cast 30.  
New Songs. New Specialties.**

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**SEE** { **The Awe Inspiring Rescue of a  
Child from a Den of Savage  
African Lions.**    ✎ ✎ ✎

Small "dodger" scattered about the towns before a performance.

Once, when the safety slide had not yet been slipped into place, one of the lions took up a position at the wrong end of the cage, and refused to budge. The villain, with Lillian in his arms, had twice vowed he would fling her to the beasts, and was ready to vow again, when somebody behind the scenes had an inspiration. Two men from the wings rushed upon the villain, and while the fierce struggle for the child held the audience, the stage-hands persuaded the lion to be reasonable.

The heroine in "Her First False Step" was a tall, handsome woman, Helen Ray. Lillian and Dorothy played her two little girls. In one scene Dorothy and her "mother" are out in the snow, as Lillian rushes in, to find them. She has a lollypop for Dorothy, who claps her hands with joy while Lillian kneels by Miss Ray, saying: "Oh, mother, what are you doing out here in the cold snow?" Often it was cold enough, too. The air, not the snow. The latter was swept up every night, to be used at the next performance. Sometimes other things were swept up with it, and were likely to hit them on the head—nails, bits of wood, a little dry mouse.

A real romance goes with the "False Step" season—one with a "happy-ever-after" ending. In one of the larger towns, a young actor from another company came to a *matinée* and was much struck by the beauty of Helen Ray, whom he had never met. That night he managed to come again, and next day at rehearsal time was lingering around the stage entrance. Dorothy, with a beloved Teddybear, was playing just outside. He struck up an acquaintance with her, and was invited in, to see her other possessions. A very few minutes later he had met Helen Ray. When the season had ended, they were married. At last accounts they were still married—and happy—after more than twenty-five years.

Lillian and Dorothy, at the theatre before the others, had diversions of their own. Both dearly loved lemon-sticks, especially if oranges went with them. To suck orange juice through a lemon stick was pure delight. They would run across the dressing-room and jam their oranges against the wall.

In a corner of the first-act-set, they would set up a

play-house. They did not play at "acting," like other children. They would put on long dresses, and play at "keeping house"—having a home. When it came time for the performance, they hurried, not very eagerly, to change into the costumes required for their parts. They were not unhappy. They did not reflect much whether they liked what they were doing, or not. They just did it. The parts they played were always sad—pathetic, but not more so than their lives. They did not know that, but their mother did.

If one might have looked into Mary Gish's heart at this time, just what would one have found there? Chiefly, of course, devotion to her children—thought of their immediate welfare and needs. After that? Was it to equip them for the career of actresses—a life which, unless they were at the top, was hardly to be called enviable, and even at its best was one of impermanent triumphs and fitful rewards? She knew pretty well that with their special kind of beauty, which each day she saw develop—their flair for subtle phases of human portrayal—given health, they could count on at least reasonable success. Did she greatly desire that? I think not. I think she considered it, but that her real purpose was to keep her children and herself on the stage only until by close, the very closest, economy, she had saved enough to establish herself in a permanent business which would give them a home, where they could go to school and grow into normal, or what she regarded as normal, womanhood. I think the old prejudice which she had shared with her family as to the theatre, did not die easily, and that for years she felt herself more or less "beyond the pale," willing to stay there only because it



A SCENE FROM "HER FIRST FALSE STEP"





meant a livelihood, with the possibility of something better, something with a home in it, not too far ahead. We shall see the effort she made in this direction, by and by, and what came of it—how the web of circumstance had its will with her, as with us all.

Whatever her plan, Mary Gish saw that she must educate her children. Herself reared in a town that rather specializes in education, she had known the advantage of excellent public schools. That her children should have less than herself was a distressing thought. From little books, at every spare moment, she taught them. In every town of importance, she made it her business to learn what she could of its history, its population, its industries, and of these she told them in as interesting a form as she could invent. In the South, she told them of the war; when it was possible, showed them landmarks, often taking them on little excursions.

In one city she had a special interest: Chattanooga, where an uncle, a Captain McConnell, had been killed in the battle above the clouds. When she found they had time there, she took the children for a drive up Lookout Mountain, telling them the story as they went along. And then a remarkable thing happened: they came to a tablet by the roadside, and paused to read the inscription. It was a tablet to Captain McConnell, commemorating his bravery.

She did not hold them to schoolbooks. She read them story books, or allowed an actor named Strickland—"Uncle High" in the play, because he was so tall—to read to them—from "Black Beauty," which was their favorite, and Grimm's and Andersen's Fairy Tales. In a seat on the train, when all were awake at once, or during a wait in a



station—oh, anywhere—Uncle High was faithful, and those little girls never ceased to remember it.

Uncle High was really very tall—"six feet six, and skinny as a blue-racer" according to one of the notices. In the play there was a house-warming, at which he was one of the guests. When Uncle High entered, Lillian, the "golden-haired grandchild," was moved to examine him. They stood just at the footlights, and very deliberately she looked him up and down until the snickering audience was still. Then very gravely: "Grandpa, what is he standing on?" a line, according to Uncle High, that was "always a scream."

"Uncle High" further remembers that "no matter what time of night Lillian and Dorothy had to get out of a warm, comfortable bed to catch a train, or how many times they had to be awakened to change cars, no one ever heard a whimper or complaint from either, and I cannot recall one instance where they ever found any fault with anything, and I never heard their mother speak a cross word to either of them. Lillian was just like a little mother to Dorothy, and looked after her all the time. Her whole life seemed to be to watch that nothing happened to her little sister. And Lillian *only eight years old.*" She was, in fact, considerably less.

Mrs. Gish's skilful handicraft included drawing. She had received no art instruction but her pen sketches were exquisite. She thought them poor, and destroyed them. There remains only a water-color interior—subtle in tone, atmospheric—of a quality that commands immediate attention.

It seems curious that she should also have had a taste for

mechanics. Delicate mechanics. She enjoyed taking a clock apart and putting it together again. A clock that did not go was her delight. Once that winter, when they were all together, a clock in their room had gone out of commission. Mary Gish examined it, then set to work. In a brief time she had it on the operating table, the pieces here and there. Dorothy's deep interest may have had something to do with the fact that when she came to assemble them, two insignificant bits seemed to be missing. Never mind, the clock would go without them. It would go, but with a gay indifference to time, and every little while made queer noises in its inside. Lillian and Dorothy, in bed in that room, laughed themselves to sleep, listening to its complaints.

They found amusement where they could—the situation was so often barren enough. Once, remembering, Lillian said:

"Sometimes the theatre was very poor, and the dressing-rooms nearly always bad (even to this day they could be better). Some were worse than others. At a theatre in Chicago, a theatre of the second or third class, a good way out, the dressing-rooms were in a kind of cellar. There was water on the floor—we had to walk on boards. I remember the big, black water-bugs. Mother had to shake out our dresses, before we put them on.

"The Gerry Society was very strict in Chicago. We hardly dared to show ourselves outside the theatre and hotel. Four or five years later, when I was perhaps twelve, and we were there again, Mother put me into long skirts and high heels, so that I could look sixteen, and reduce the risk. I felt very proud to be grown-up in that sudden way."

But the winter travel was hardest. One town they were to play could be reached only from a junction, six miles distant. That night a terrible blizzard came up, and the company, quite a large one, had to be driven cross-country in big farm sleighs, bedded with straw. It was terribly cold, their feet became ice. And when they arrived, the train was five hours late! The place was just a telegraph office; the little girls were allowed to stretch out on the desks, which were sloping;—members of the company took turns, holding them from rolling off.

The problem of food was a serious one, especially in the smaller towns of the Middle West. Dorothy was robust, and seemed to thrive on anything; Lillian needed better fare.

“Dorothy and I lived, when we could, on ice-cream and cake. Mother would give us fifteen cents, and we would spend ten cents for ice-cream, half vanilla and half chocolate. With the other five we bought lady-fingers. We mixed the cream, stirred the two kinds together, and made ‘mashed potatoes’; then we spread it on the lady-fingers.”

It does not seem very substantial, nor an over-plentiful allowance. They were being very economical, trying to get a little money ahead. At one wonderful restaurant—in some Western town—they were able to get a meal for ten cents! Just one place like that: soup, meat, potatoes, and a piece of pie! Perhaps it was not very good, but it seemed good, to them.

And two places in the South—good negro cooking:

“At Richmond and Norfolk, we went to boarding-houses, where we had chicken and ham at *one meal*, and sweet potatoes, and gingerbread! Nothing could be better

than that. We were always happy when we were going to those places; and there was a park in one of those towns where there were squirrels. We bought peanuts, and they would hurry up to be fed.

"There was another place—it was in New Haven—that Dorothy and I looked forward to. In the hall next the dressing-rooms, was a small sliding door, or window, and beyond it an ice-cream salon. We could knock on the magic door and it would open, and a chocolate ice-cream soda be handed through. You can't imagine how wonderful that seemed to us . . . like something out of Fairyland. Then there was a place in Philadelphia—an automat—the only one we had ever seen. It was the delight of our hearts. We were willing to walk miles, to get to it."

Philadelphia was remembered for another reason. A considerable number of newsboys attended a *matinée* of "Her First False Step," and hissed the villain and cheered the brave hero and the two little heroines in good, orthodox fashion. At the end of the play, the delegation hurried out and assembled at the back. When Lillian and Dorothy, in velveteen hats and coats and patent leather shoes, stepped from the stage door, they were waited upon by a meek and almost speechless committee of two and presented with two rare bottles of perfume, the best "five-and-ten" that money could buy. The stars bowed and spoke their thanks. After which, there was something resembling a cheer, and an almost uncanny disappearance of their admirers.

A very serious thing happened: At Scranton, Dorothy awoke one morning with what proved to be scarlet fever. It was not a severe case, but the company, knowing the certainty of quarantine, fled at once, bag and baggage,

taking Lillian with them. The hotel faced the station platform, a high one, almost on a level with the windows of Mrs. Gish's room. Lillian, waiting for the train that would take her away from them, could see her mother and Dorothy at the window, waving a tearful good-bye. It seemed as if her heart must break.

How long they were separated is not remembered—possibly not more than a fortnight. Dorothy's part was abandoned. Later, she was given the part that had been played by Lillian. And this is curious: Lillian herself had never been at all afraid when she was thrust into the lions' cage, but now that Dorothy had the part, it made her almost frantic when she heard the lions roaring, and knew that her little sister was being put in there.

The season appears to have closed in Boston, and for whatever reason—possibly Dorothy was not yet over-strong—Mrs. Gish went by day-coach to New York, putting Dorothy and Lillian into an upper berth, in the sleeper. They had with them a small dog—a Boston bull puppy, which the stage-hands had given them—and all night long, they took turns sitting up with it. One slept while the other watched, with more or less success. Then, next morning, they were in New York, tired but triumphant. They were returning from a long season—forty weeks!—and on the whole, a successful one. Two little actresses! They were beginning to realize what their work meant.

It seems unnecessary to speak of the quality of their acting. We really know nothing of it; we can only assume that, like the majority of actors, old or young, they did just about what they were told, and through repetition, and because they were intelligent, learned to do it well.



LILLIAN AND DOROTHY GISH





They had begun too early to be either awkward, or frightened, after the first one or two performances. The people beyond the foot-lights did not bother them at all. They scarcely knew they were there. Lillian, later:

“I had very little consciousness of the audience, in those days. When they applauded or laughed, I hardly noticed it. I remember wondering what they were laughing about. To become an actress, one cannot begin too soon.”



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X

DOROTHY'S TREE

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AGAIN that summer Mary Gish had a taffy and popcorn stand at Fort George. Probably not after that, though each summer found her busy. Alert, handsome, familiar with business, she never failed of employment. Lillian remembers that there were summers when she took a clerkship, and let the little girls go to their aunt, in Massillon, for the cleaner life there, and for schooling—a summer term. A teacher in Massillon recalls having Lillian in the Fourth Grade—year uncertain. Also, that she “never had a lovelier or sweeter pupil; wonderful in art, but could not get mathematics.” Poor Lillian! to her, as to another little girl a hundred years earlier—little Marjorie Fleming—“seven times six was an invention of the devil, and nine times eight more than human nature could bear.”

That she could write quite as well as the average child of her age is shown by a small pencilled note to Mell Faris, manager of the “False Step” Company when the little family had been together. She had been out a season “on her own” since then, and was with Dorothy, now, at Aunt Emily’s “having a fine time, playing in the yard. I do wish we could get into a ‘company’ with you next season.” But the spelling is for the most part perfect.

Another teacher remembers having her in the Seventh Grade, in 1907, so it appears that in spite of recurring theatrical seasons, she made progress. In the summer of 1907 she was not yet eleven years old. I do not know whether that is the right age in Massillon for the Seventh

Grade, or not. The wonder is that she was able to maintain any grade, under the circumstances.

Dorothy was better off. Lillian had her mother but the one time; Dorothy, during five straight seasons: the one just ended; another "False Step" season, and three seasons with Fisk O'Hara, the Irish singing comedian, a happy soul, who gave her a broken heart, among other things, for she forgot the heroic Don, and fell in love with him. He promised to wait for her, and then, one day, in an absent-minded moment, married his leading lady.

Mrs. Gish kept her part during the second season of the "False Step" Company, and had something in each of the Fisk O'Hara plays. The company was a very good one, made good towns and played in good theatres. The papers paid a good deal of attention to Dorothy. Her dimpled face looked out from dramatic columns; the little scrap-book which her mother kept for her contains notices of the "dainty child actress, who risks her life nightly in a lions' den," or "ably supported Fisk O'Hara in 'Dion O'Dare.'" False Fisk O'Hara! We hope he has been properly punished for not waiting for her.

It was during the second season in "Her First False Step" that Dorothy had her Christmas Tree. In the last act of the play, there was a Christmas scene—no tree, but Dorothy, looking into the wings, had to pretend to see one. In his book, "To Youth," John V. A. Weaver,\* gives this incident in verse better than anyone could hope to do it in prose. Here is the latter half of it:

Of course, we never carried a Christmas tree,  
But she was supposed to act like it was there.  
Well, then, we get to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin,  
And, bein' it's really Christmas, the rest of the troupe

\* Published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

They get a bright idea. They're goin' to give  
The kid a celebration, to make her happy.  
So then, Dorothy's goin' along, as usual,  
Doin' her stuff real good. And the third act,  
She starts to gallop on in her big scene—

And there's a real tree standin' on the stage,  
Lit up with candles, and hung with all the fixin's!

She takes three steps—and her eyes start to pop.  
She stops dead in her tracks, tries to go on  
Sayin' her words—and gives a couple of gulps,  
And busts out cryin'. And she cries, and cries,  
Watchin' the tree. And the audience all laughin',

And me dried up, with lumps stuck in my throat . . .

Finally, they have to ring the curtain down.  
I tell you, it ain't fair to have a little  
Yellow-haired kid puttin' things in your head,—  
Things you gave up many's the year ago.

It was a season or two later, when they were with the Fisk O'Hara Company, that Dorothy woke one night in a hotel in Toledo, to find her mother very ill indeed, with high fever and delirium. The day before, she had complained of a cold, and Dorothy had bought her a bottle of some mixture, chiefly persuaded by the picture on the label. Apparently it had not helped. The frightened child crept down the hall to summon help.

Mrs. Gish had intermittent fever, and Dorothy next day had to leave her and go on with the company. There was nobody to take her part. She was only too kindly treated, but during the days before her mother joined them, she was a sadly worried little girl.

Once—and this has to do with another Christmas—the Fisk O'Hara Company laid off in New Orleans, and went one night to see "The Lion and the Mouse," at the theatre they would occupy the following week. On the way out, Dorothy noticed a purse in one of the back rows. She took it to the box office, to the manager, who knew them. He said: "If nobody calls for it, it will be yours."

Nobody did call for it, and the next week he gave it to her. It contained \$21.00, a sum which they could have used very handily, but instead they went out and spent it on a gold watch to send to Lillian, for Christmas.

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## XI

### “SUPPORTING BERNHARDT”

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THERE is some difficulty as to the sequence of Lillian's story. As we have seen, she did not go out with her mother and Dorothy that second season of "Her First False Step." She had a part in another play—"The Child Wife," or "At Duty's Call," it is not quite certain which came first. The little trouper did not know that she was making history—did not consider a time when it all might need to be arranged. She did not keep a scrapbook, and had no one to keep it for her. She probably did not think of a diary, and in any case would have been too tired to set down what, to her, was the humdrum routine of trains and towns and waits and scanty meals. Later, it was all a good deal of a blur. A few things stood out, because they were unusual, but even these did not always fall into their proper setting, as to time. There are spaces not easy to bridge, pieces difficult to fit into the picture-puzzle of the years. She remembers the tragedy of finding at the beginning of one season that she could no longer squeeze herself through the iron divisions of the station seats. She remembers that for a time she took lessons in dancing—stage dancing. Both she and her mother had realized the value of this: one able to dance could often get a better part. Sarah Bernhardt came to New York that winter, and seeking a child dancer to brighten some scene in one of her plays, went to a dancing teacher, and from his class selected Lillian.

Bernhardt was over sixty at this time, but was still the

"divine Sarah, with the voice of gold." Her engagement at the Lyric Theatre began with a very grand opening, December 15, 1905. Plenty of attractions along Broadway, just then. At Wallack's, William Faversham, in "The Squaw Man"; David Warfield at the Bijou, in "The Music Master"; Maude Adams at the Empire, in "Peter Pan." The little Gish girl had distinguished company in all directions for her first Broadway appearance. Perhaps that was a good omen.

Lillian's recollection of that engagement is chiefly a mental picture of a tall and beautiful woman—Sarah—who each night in the wings, as they waited to go on, laid her hand on her head and said, tenderly, something in French—"Le petit ange aux beaux cheveux d'or," if one may hazard a guess. Then, with another little girl, she danced. She was deeply impressed by the fact that the stage was covered with canvas, for the actors to walk on. The stages she had known were not like that—oh, not at all. And did somebody appear and carry her off, quite suddenly—kidnap her? She has that impression, but cannot be certain.

Long afterwards, when she herself had become famous, Madame Bernhardt sent her affectionate messages.

Lillian's memory was never very good as to events and surroundings. She memorized her parts easily enough, and her lessons, because she worked very hard at any task. At the beginning of each season came a period of rehearsing—with many new "sides" (pages) to be learned, if the play was a new one. Absorbing things, these. Other matters—the daily round, the people she met, the details of an environment—interfered little with the cadences of her thoughts, left but a drifting impression

on that fairy mind of hers. While still a child, she had seen too much, and too many—of everything. And it had all been just a pursuit of sleep and desirable food, and a longing for the shelter of a mother's arms. That last, especially—when one was not well . . . nights . . . days, too . . . oh, yes, and the ache of homesickness . . . is it any wonder that more and more her face took on that wistful look that one day would be regarded almost as its chief charm?

There were happier things—even another Christmas Tree, quite a big one! In Detroit, the stage entrance of the theatre where "At Duty's Call" was playing, opened on an alley, and just across was a store where automobile parts were sold. The men who owned it went to the play, and took enough interest in the "child star" to go to the manager and offer to have a tree for her, in their back room. All the company was invited, and came. Such a beautiful tree, with so many nice things on it! A grateful little girl was quite overcome; especially by a handsome sled which the company had bought for her. Everybody said that it must go with her, on the road. And they saw to it that it did. Always, after that, when there was snow—even if only just a little snow—they pulled her to the station on it, after the performance.



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## XII

### MASSILLON DAYS

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SEASONS changed . . . the years went on. From the train window, Lillian saw the snow come, then go, leaving only lines along the hedgerows, or white tracks across the watery meadows to show which way winter had passed. Then flowers, bits of blue and white and yellow . . . after that, summer, and New York, or maybe Massillon.

Lillian realized that she was growing tall . . . too tall, almost, for the parts she was playing. She supposed that presently she would have to give up the stage, and go to school regularly, or at least until she was old enough for the more grown-up parts. Perhaps that would be in New York . . . more likely in Massillon. She hoped it would be Massillon. She liked it there, at Aunt Emily's place, which they called "the farm," (though it was not really that,) especially when Dorothy was there, too. They helped Aunt Emily with her housekeeping, and when that was done, they could run in the fields, not far away. Buster, the dog, ran with them, and insisted on following Dorothy, like Mary's lamb, to a little school she went to, and nearly broke up the classes. The teacher was like Mary's, too. She turned Buster out, and when he "lingered near," threatened to do terrible things to him.

There was an old bicycle at Massillon, a rusty old thing without tires, but it would go. It was too big, of course, but Lillian had got it out of the woodshed and lowered the seat, and had been able to get on it, and fall, and get on and fall again, and by and by to get on and stay there.



She had really learned to ride it—that was something.

Almost anything was likely to happen at “the farm”—mostly pleasant things, but not always. There was an insane asylum in Massillon, and when one of the inmates escaped, which happened every little while, the asylum whistle blew, and timid people locked their doors. Aunt Emily at such times sent her nieces to the attic, or cellar. They did not like those places, and were not afraid, anyhow. They were more afraid of a cow that had chased them from a back field.

Lillian reflected that once she had been really quite wicked: A black thundercloud was rising in the west, just as she was starting to see her friend, Marion Benedict, down the street. Lillian never minded lightning, but her aunt was terribly afraid of it and begged her not to go and leave her.

“But I told Marion I would come!”

“But you can go later—afterwards.”

“But I want to go now.”

“Oh, dear, I believe you love Marion Benedict better than you do me.”

“Yes, I do.”

How awful to have said such a thing to dear Aunt Emily, who was so shocked that never in the world would she forget it! Perhaps it had been the lightning in the air.

Once, a cousin had come to see them—a second cousin, named Leonard Hall, about her own age. Their mother was there, and had dressed them up for the occasion—white dresses, their hair loose, with big pink bows; they had been almost as nice as dolls. She had thought her boy cousin quite nice, too, for a boy—and boy cousins were so scarce. She had hoped he would play with them . . .

but he would hardly even look at them—edged away, and then ran, almost as if something were after him . . . and didn't come back any more. She wondered why. They had on all their prettiest things, and Dorothy at least had been a perfect picture.

Lillian reflected on these matters as she rode along, or looked from a hotel window. If she went to Massillon this summer, would she see her cousin again? And Buster, and Marion Benedict? Would she stay there, now, and go to school, or go back to the road for another season? She thought dreamily of these and other things. She did not trouble much, about the future, or the past—then, or later. She followed a kind of magic path, that opened before, and closed behind her as she passed along.

There came a season when the theatrical business was poor. The road companies, especially, suffered. Their profits became more than ever precarious. Motion picture shows were cutting into their business. One-night-stand theatres were being converted into "picture palaces," and "nickelodeons," that offered pretty good entertainment at ridiculously low prices, and had very light "overhead." The combinations, the smaller ones, with their salaries and railroad fares, could not compete. Lillian went out with quite a pretentious company, and a play which was "sure to get to New York and make a hit on Broadway." It did not get much further than Washington, where it opened. At Baltimore, or Richmond, it came to grief. The company had trouble getting home. At a later time, Lillian wrote: "When we were ambitious and went into better productions, the plays seemed to fail." But this was due rather to the new conditions in the amusement world,

than because of the plays themselves. The "movies" had filed a claim on the melodrama. One could scorn them, as many did in the beginning, but the handwriting was on the wall.

Mary Gish wondered what was best to do next. She had saved some money, but with nothing coming in, how quickly it would go.

For one thing, she must have a new dress. The children said so, quite insistently, and she knew they were right.

"We begged her to buy a new one. Finally, one day, she bought some Alice-blue material and made herself a gown. She always made all the clothes, herself. Then we begged her to get a new hat. So she went to the five-and-ten-cent store, and bought a frame for a little toque, and covered it with little five-and-ten roses. She looked so pretty in her new things—and we were all so happy. We thought everything so beautiful. She was not to wear them until Easter.

"We lived in furnished rooms over by Eighth Avenue, away up I don't know how many flights, next the roof. Mother put her dress on a hanger, and hung it in a closet, with the hat over it. We all gathered to admire it. It was such an event for mother to have a new dress.

"That night there came up a terrible rain, and the roof over the closet leaked. The water came through in streams, and ran down over mother's new hat, and the color came out of the lovely five-and-ten roses and dripped all over the new Alice-blue dress. It was ruined. We all cried over it; it was a real tragedy."

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### XIII

#### WHERE THE "ROAD" ENDS. NELL

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NEWS came to Mrs. Gish that a brother in St. Louis had died, leaving a widow. She took the children to Massillon, went to St. Louis, and with her sister-in-law, opened a confectionery and ice-cream parlor, in East St. Louis, a rather drab railroad town across the river.

The business started off very well. Railroad men were good wage-earners, and East St. Louis was full of them. In a way, it was what Mary Gish had been looking forward to: her children would no longer be wanderers; they would go to school.

Lillian and Dorothy, in Massillon, probably did not suspect that their day as child actors was definitely over. Nor that they were among the last of their race. Their little world had come to an end—"A curious, romantic, gypsy world," Lillian called it later, "and rather beautiful, I think."

But this was long after. They did not think of it as beautiful, then, and would have concealed their connection with it, if they could. The children in the Massillon school shouted "Play-actor! Play-actor!" at Dorothy, and "Do what you used to do on the stage!" They did not harry Lillian in this way: she was older, and taller, and there was something about her face . . . they stood in awe of her. Someone named her the "chameleon girl," because she seemed to change the "coloring of her personality (her mood) in the flash of an eye."

Lillian does not remember where she first met "Nell"—

Nellie Becker, a sweet-faced, happy-hearted girl, somewhat older than herself. Lillian was tall for her years, and serious-minded—the difference did not count. What did count was their instant attraction to each other. Beginning in what school-girls know as a “crush,” it presently ripened into something less fleeting, something that was to stand the wear of years. Each was the other’s ideal—the companion of which she had dreamed. They shared their hearts’ secrets, read books together. A fine young fellow, named Tom, was going to marry Nell one of these days; a boy called “Alb,” for short—a very proper boy, particular about his umbrella and overshoes—appears to have been wishfully interested in Lillian, who, being of a sober turn and not yet thirteen, was not too violently disturbed by his attentions. Whatever romantic love she had, she gave to Nell. When, at the end of the summer, she joined her mother in East St. Louis, she wrote frequent letters, though letter-writing was always her bane.

Not many girls of her age would have set out on a long railroad trip, with changes, but rail travel had few terrors for the child actress, who for six or seven years had known little else. She stopped over in Dayton, to see her Grandfather, and her first letter, with its very plain, school-girl writing, some uncertainty as to spelling, and a large indifference to punctuation, is dated from there: September 12, 1909:

Well dear I am away from Massillon once again, but feel as if I had left something behind this time that I never left before.

I arrived here at 4:05 yesterday afternoon and have been on one continual trot ever since then, and I leave here tonight at 11:25, and when I wake up I’ll be in St. Louis, as this is an awfully fast train. . . .

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[An all-night ride in a day coach, but what was that to her?]

Poor Dorothy what did she do when I left? I could hardly keep the tears back, and I couldn't say a word for the lump in my throat. . . . I do hope she won't be homesick. You know that feeling . . .

"*You know that feeling*"—who knew it better than herself? The letter ends, "Your loving make-believe sister." It bears her East St. Louis address: 246 Collinsville Ave.

A week later she wrote, "How is my little fat sister? Does she seem to be satisfied? Bless her old fat heart, she is bad but I love her."

She tells of a day's trip to a small town in Illinois, and how, when she got back to the store, they were "awfully rushed, so of course I had to help." In another letter, we hear of a girl named Mertice, who is going to give a party for her, "at a big Hall."

They have ordered an automobile, seven passenger—45 horsepower, but it won't be here until March. Oh, I wish you would hear her talk about all the trips we are going to take. She knows all about you, Nell. She couldn't help but know if she is around me very long.



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## XIV

### A CONVENT SCHOOL. TYPHOID

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LILLIAN never got to ride in Mert's 45 horse-power car. Almost immediately she found herself shut safely in a convent school across the river—The Ursuline Academy—not for anything she had done, or was likely to do, but because this plan seemed to offer special advantages. Her mother lived in a tiny room, near the store. It was in no sense a home, and working as she did, twelve or fourteen hours a day, she could give a daughter very little care. A public school would mean that Lillian's free hours would have to be spent in the store, on the street, or with her aunt across the river. No place for play, no place for study. The Ursuline Academy provided board and tuition for twenty dollars a month, and was thought to be very good.

Lillian was not at first greatly interested in the convent idea, especially when she learned she could leave it but once a month. It was just another kind of those dreaded "Institutions."

She changed her mind about all that, later. It seemed to her that at last she had reached a place of peace and rest. No troubles, no dangers, any more. She was a natural *religiense*, and found a vast and nameless comfort behind the high walls and closed windows. The place might have been in the midst of the Sahara, for all that could be seen of the outer world.

The convent régime was not especially severe. Only the early rising was hard. They rose at 5:30, and had break-

fast by candlelight—mild coffee and thick slices of bread. At ten came a between-luncheon, bread and jam; a hearty luncheon at noon, with bread and jam again at four; then supper, so they really ate five times a day. There was plenty of work: lessons, piano practice, French . . . but one could walk in the little garden, and there was a tennis court, and trees. And something more: to Nell she wrote:

We are going to have a play and an opera, and what do you think, they wanted me to play Kate's father in "The Taming of the Shrew." Can you imagine me taking that part and singing in a real low voice? But I told them I could not, and so they are going to give me a part in the play.

They knew nothing of her stage life—an episode always carefully suppressed. Baggage labels were scraped off when they left New York. The stage door was slammed to. But she could not disguise her technical knowledge—not altogether. They gave her Bianca in the opera, and a leading part in the play, as soon as they saw her rehearse.

Lillian confessed later that her ambition at this time was to be either an actress or a nun—or a librarian. She had a passion for reading, and thought as a librarian she could gratify it. To Nell, she wrote: "I am not going out for a month and will have to write all my letters on the slish,"—which was a sin, though spelling it in that way seems to modify it a good deal—"and carry them in my stocking untill mother comes and mails them." Oh, dear, and in a convent, where she thought she would like to remain forever, and become a sister, like Mother Evaristo, whom she loved very much indeed! To another sister, teacher of elocution and dramatics, she confided her wish to take the veil, and was advised against it—*advised to go*



*on the stage*—which led to penance, on the part of the sister, a dear soul.

Each Sunday her mother came to see her, with news of the outside world, and once a month, with the others, she was allowed to pass the gates—a privilege she valued less and less. She might so easily have become a nun; and in the tragic "White Sister," made fourteen years later, we have seen just what sort of a nun she would have become. That picture was really a pendant of her earlier experience, which she never remembered but with a peculiar affection, and a sense of peace. During the eight or nine months she was with them, the sisters made no attempt to influence her religious views, but they were always tenderly kind to her, and always later felt that she belonged to them.

School ended . . . Dorothy came from Massillon. They lived with their St. Louis aunt, boarders, going each day across the river, to help. A narrow hall ran along one side of the shop, dividing it from a "Biograph" moving-picture place. They did not know the word Biograph. They thought it the name of a man—probably a rather kindly man, for his doorkeeper let them cross the hall and enter by a side door, free. They did it often, when trade was dull, and found the pictures good fun, though of course they would never *act* in anything like that—no real actresses would. When they grew up, they might go back on the stage, but never into the movies. And the Weaver who sits at the Loom of Circumstance smiled faintly, it may be, observing from his pattern that in exactly two years these young scorners were to be making pictures for that same "Mr. Biograph."

There came a day when Lillian felt barely able to creep out of bed in the morning; when at the shop she could hardly hold up her head, or lift her feet. She had to drive herself to keep going. She knew that she was ill—but said nothing; her mother was too busy to bother with a sick child. Finally, one day when she crept home with Dorothy, to her aunt's, she could go no further. She fell across the bed, unable to undress, even to take off her shoes. A doctor came. It was typhoid fever.

Disordered days . . . black, fantastic nights, a fire of unquenchable thirst . . . a river at which one lay down and drank and drank . . . and then the river ran dry . . . she was burning up, but this was torture . . . not a river but a tub—a bathtub of cool water. Oh, quiet and sleep . . . an awakening to a possession of terrible hunger—a feeble pleading for food . . . just a little . . .

Dorothy, unable to resist, brought her something from her own luncheon . . . but, then the fever again . . . relapse . . . semi-recovery . . . relapse again. Surely she could never live through this.

Somehow the frail constitution stood the test. Dorothy, permitted one day to enter the room, found Lillian with a wish-bone in her hand. Struck with terror, Dorothy started toward her, to take it away. But the patient, a staring little ghost, all eyes, put it to her lips. If Dorothy came closer, she would eat something, and surely die. Each time Dorothy started toward the bed, the bone went to Lillian's lips. She hurried out to tell the others about it—and was told that Lillian was better—much better, this time—the wish-bone was just a bone—nothing on it, not a thing.

The convalescent noticed that her mother was with her

a great deal, and vaguely wondered how she could be away from the store. One day they told her. The store was not there any more. Fire from the Biograph place had destroyed the building. There had been no insurance. Mary Gish was once more starting at the bottom. Worse. She had not enough to pay all the expense of Lillian's illness. Somehow she was able to get the children to Massillon. Through connections she secured a place as manager of a confectionery-and-catering establishment—in Springfield, where she had begun; good enough salary,—long, long hours. The children were to remain at Massillon, with Aunt Emily, and go to school. Blessed Aunt Emily!

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XV

SHAWNEE

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BUT now from Shawnee, Oklahoma, came a letter from an uncle, Grant Gish, saying that his brother, James Gish, was in a sanitarium, in broken health. Lillian decided to go to him. This was near the end of October, 1910, when she had just turned fourteen. She went quite alone. To Nell, on arrival, she wrote:

*My dear little sister:*

I arrived safe yesterday morning and went to the hotel and slept until about ten o'clock & then I came right out here, and they are awfully nice to me, but Oh! dear how I wish I were home with you and we were reading "John Halifax"! I hope we will soon be able to finish that together. . . .

I didn't want to come, dear, but I thought it was my duty. It's awfully hard to do your duty sometimes, and you know that I met with opposition on all sides but I have done what I think was right and I am glad that I did it. . . .

With love love love

from LILLIAN.

201 N. Park St.  
Shawnee, Okla.

How lightly she treats her arrival in Shawnee—not to distress Nell, or those who would inquire. It was really very different. Shawnee, twenty years ago, was rather unlike the thriving town it became later. It was two in the morning when Lillian got off on a desolate platform, and found nobody to welcome her. A light from across the street showed a lone cowboy, in chaps, and "ten-gallon

hat," curiously regarding her. It was exactly such a scene and situation as the pictures have used, time and again. She had never seen a cowboy before, and regretted that she saw this one. She does not remember whether she asked the way to the hotel, or whether it stood right there, facing the tracks. She does remember that it was an indifferent hotel, compared even with the hotels she had known on the road.

The room they showed her was probably as good as any they had, which is the best that could be said for it. She was disheartened—frightened. She wished she had listened to those persons who had told her not to come. Old trouser that she was, she had never seen so poor a room, and she had never slept, in any room, alone. She was distinctly scared. She put a chair against the door, and did not take off her clothes. Then she heard a scampering or scratching, or something—rats, no doubt. Or somebody breaking in.

A single light hung by a string from the ceiling. She did not turn it out, and she did not get into bed. She got *on* it, on her knees, and said her prayers—several times—improving them, and inventing new ones. It was only when daylight came that she decided to risk a little sleep. It is easy to believe that she slept then till ten o'clock, as she wrote Nell.

Lillian thinks that her father was not in Shawnee itself (the town in that day could hardly have had a sanitarium), but that he was in Oklahoma City, some thirty-five miles distant. She did not go to see him; he came to see her—not more than once or twice. She has a mental picture of him in her uncle's dooryard, talking to her as she

sat on a horse. "Be careful, pet," he said to her; "Don't let that pony go too fast." Pet had been his old name for her.

There must have been more than that, but that tricky memory of hers let the rest go, and what it kept is perhaps sufficient. She had not seen him for years, but he looked as she had expected to find him. Apparently, his physical health was good enough; his trouble had become mental. He did not die until the following year, when she had returned to Ohio.

Lillian's aunt and uncle persuaded her to stay in Shawnee and go to school. She could help her aunt with the housekeeping, for her board, and be company for her. Her uncle, a locomotive engineer, was away a good deal of the time.

Lillian thought well of the idea. She rather liked Shawnee, once she got used to it, especially the riding. Soon she got to know an Indian girl, who rode with her and had plenty of ponies. A wonderful girl—she rode as if she were a part of the horse. There were Indians, of course, everywhere—"civilized Indians," whatever we may mean by that; also, cowboys and other romantic features. Then she found she could get a place in a doctor's office—work after school and on holidays—answering the telephone and marking down appointments. For this she was to receive two dollars and a half a week—all clear.

The school part was the hardest. She had made a mistake in the beginning: When she was asked about her grade, some imp prompted her to promote herself. She was accepted at her own valuation, but keeping up to it nearly killed her. She could do it all but the mathematics. Advanced arithmetic was just a jangle of terrors, algebra an uncharted sea from which daily she must be rescued as



she was going down for the third time. What with one thing and another, her punishment seemed almost more than she could bear. . . .

Her face took on an added wistfulness; she became more than ever like a spirit. Gladys Fariss, her schoolmate, watching her come down the evening hillside, the sunset in her hair, could think only of Saint Cecilia. . . .

Lillian, her memory blurred by her mental struggle, had no clear picture of Shawnee in later years. Fortunately, Gladys has preserved it for us.

Lillian Gish! How often have I dreamed of her—heard her musical voice from out the purple distances. What a joy to recall her in my classes of Shawnee High.

We were in the English class together. She especially enjoyed literature. . . . I sat and watched the door each day for Lillian's coming from her previous class. Classmates, the teacher, the class work, have long since passed into oblivion, but photographed in my memory is the picture, framed by the doorway.

She had recently recovered from typhoid fever. Her hair was a golden halo, alive with newness, about her oval face. It was worn caught loosely back and with a black ribbon bow. At the Junior-Senior dance we sophomores were invited guests . . . Lillian dressed in filmy white was dancing . . . classically, romantically, as with enchanted feet, an ivory statuette, in a world of chiffon and moonlight.

She sang in the choir of the Episcopal Church. She was spiritual and philosophic, a dreamer, quiet and far-seeing. She was a listener, never outspoken. She was somewhat retiring, yet not abashed. She talked very little of her life. I never remember her mentioning the stage.

She loved the out-of-doors—the sunshine, which seemed to be a part of her. . . . Upon returning a borrowed book, I shall never forget her graciousness of manner and kindliness of words. . . .



In the English class one day, we exchanged themes for a remembrance. This theme of hers has always been my most prized possession. It is a graphic and beautiful description of her mother, and incidentally somewhat of herself.

*"The Face Most Familiar to Me.*

During the thirty-five winters that have passed over her dear head, she has learned to know life's vicissitudes. Instead of hardening her, they have made her a patient, sympathetic, God-fearing woman, who seems to make the burdens of life easier for those around her. She is settled and reserved in manner, and she is to be distinguished by her low, soft voice which seems to go with her dignity of motherhood. She is of medium height and size. Her hair is of a golden brown, streaked with gray, and her large, steel-gray eyes seem to see into the depths of everything. Her nose and chin are slightly pointed and her lips are closed in a way that suggests a smile. Her short, quick, decisive step shows the magnanimity of her nature. It is my most sincere wish that I may grow to be a counterpart of her.

Lillian Gish."

March 27, 1911

I entered a picture-show one afternoon, some years later, and while watching the film "The Mothering Heart," Lillian appeared on the screen. I instantly recognized her. Waiting for the return of the first reel, with the listing of the cast, I was not mistaken—her name was there.

Instilled into Lillian's soul were some of the finest of human qualities: loyalty, moral courage, patience. Hers was beauty of spirit, beauty of thought, beauty of perfection, Christ-like beauty of innocence, of sinlessness; she was unspoiled, unselfish, meek.

She was never too busy to help, never too sad to smile, never too weighed down with care to glimpse a higher vision. When I think of her, it is like stepping through darkness into the light, for I have never known a more patient, gentle and lovable

character, nor a more highly intellectual girl. Someone has said of her: "Hers is the charm of a vanishing strain of music, the haunting lyric that will neither satisfy, nor let you be—the fragrance of the flowers that perfume dreams."

In word portraiture, it would be hard to find a more exquisite picture than this school-girl memory of Lillian at fourteen.

One other bit of evidence remains out of that Shawnee school life: Lillian's "Botany Notebook"—a thick little book, and probably one of the neatest school-girl documents in existence. Every other page of it is covered with her small, meticulous writing, descriptive of plant growth, and facing each, a page of very careful pen-drawings of the "parts"—leaves, petals, rootlets, many of them delicately, daintily tinted. She took pride in her botany book, a pride not altogether out-grown to this day. Botany had been an antidote for that poisonous arithmetic and algebra.

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## XVI

### IT SOUNDS LIKE HEAVEN

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LILLIAN'S school-days were over. Just when she left Shawnee is not certain. She thinks she did not wait for the end of the term. She had finished the last page of her Botany Book, and believed she could struggle along without any more mathematics. Her mother in Springfield was working very hard—she could help.

And so the days of childhood had slipped by, and were gone. If we have taken a good many pages to tell of them, it is because most of the romance of life lies in its beginnings.

Mrs. Gish was truly working hard, but happily. Her employer, his health damaged by over-work, had turned over his comfortable home for her use and left Springfield for an indefinite period. Lillian remembers that her mother had taken up the rugs and laid down papers for them to walk on. To Nell:

. . . A porch with a large swing (big enough for four), also a barn, and a touring car. They said we could use it if we could get someone to drive it, but Mother said we would do fifty dollars worth of damage to it the first time out.

If you were here I believe I could make you get fat, because Mother sends out a quart of cream every day and all the ice-cream we can eat!

Is she really writing about Springfield? It sounds like heaven. Nothing like that had ever happened to Lillian and Dorothy before. 'Ten cents' worth of ice-cream, two

kinds, chocolate and vanilla, to stir into "mashed potatoes" and spread on lady-fingers! Their entire luncheon! Had they really ever been as frugal as that?

The glory of having all the ice-cream one could eat dimmed a little. Lillian went into the store and the hours were long. To Nell she wrote:

I started this, this morning, but had to stop. You see dear I have to be here from seven in the morning until nine at night, and eleven on Saturday night. . . .

Yes, I pray for you every night before I go to bed, and for Tom also.

And then, at the end of autumn, Nell and Tom were married. In December, Lillian wrote:

Dear Brother and Sister: I am so glad you are so happy. How beautiful to have your heart's desire, and to know that you will always have it. . . . My hours are shorter, now, from nine to six. Then I take long walks and talk to myself. Sometimes I pretend that you, Nell, are with me, and we have our heart talks once more; then I wake up. . . . I am lonesome, or homesick.

She was not very well, not equal to the long hours. That terrible ravage of typhoid had told on her. By the first of the year she was in Massillon again, always a haven in any stress. She busied herself with the housekeeping—added to her knowledge of cookery. "I must get dressed now, and make my bread down."

Saint Cecilia making bread! And neat! Even for a saint; to her aunt it seemed that she spent most of her spare time pressing her clothes.

Also, there were parties:

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I had the club Wednesday eve—the girls seemed to enjoy themselves and stayed until 10:30.

Which was verging on dissipation. There were dances, too. Especially the Masons' Washington's Birthday Ball, an incident of which is still remembered in Massillon. Aunt Emily writes:

Among the guests was a man, David Atwater by name. He must have been seventy-five, at least. During the evening, somebody suggested that he dance the minuet. He said he would be glad to do it, if they could find a partner for him. No one seemed to be able to dance it but Lillian.

We often speak of it. It was a lovely sight to see this old man, courtly and handsome, with gray hair, and the slender, beautiful young girl, with golden hair, perfect manner and bright, youthful apparel, dancing the stately minuet. We called it "Winter and Spring."

Dorothy was at a girls' boarding-school, in Alderson, West Virginia. Lillian to Nell, in May: "I expect to leave here the 20th for Springfield and then Mother and I will go to Alderson, then the three of us will proceed to Baltimore—thence to New York—then it depends upon the wind."

"Upon the wind!" Again the Weaver who sits at the Loom of Circumstance may have been slightly amused—may have reflected that this being the year 1912, a tall, large-nosed man, in a moving-picture studio on Fourteenth Street, New York, would have something to say in the matter—apparently—would seem to direct, not only pictures, but numerous human destinies.



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## PART TWO

### I

#### "MR. BIOGRAPH"

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THEY brought Dorothy from Alderson to Baltimore, and visited their old friends, the Meixners. One day they dropped into a "movie." The picture was "Lena and the Geese," a Biograph film, and when Lena walked out on the screen, behold it was Gladys Smith! So Gladys had fallen. At first it was a shock, but later in the day they considered the idea of falling, too. Especially Dorothy. Gladys was probably getting well paid for her surrender.

They went to New York, presently, took rooms and set out to find a theatrical engagement. Their hearts were set on Belasco. They knew that William J. Dean—the same who, ten years earlier, had rehearsed little Dot so strenuously—was associated with Belasco. Dean was their white hope. They found him at the Belasco Theatre. He remembered them . . . who wouldn't?

He took them into Mr. Belasco's private office—a weird place, full of statuary, all in white summer dress—introduced them, and left them there.

Lillian and Dorothy were distinctly frightened. Each tried to propel the other in the direction of the great man. Belasco himself used to tell how each in turn got behind, to push the other forward, until they had backed halfway across the room.

When the interview finally began, he told them he was putting on a fairy play, called "The Good Little Devil," and that Mary Pickford and Ernest Truex were engaged



for the leading rôles. Neither name was familiar to them. Gladys Smith had become "Mary Pickford" the winter before, but they had lost sight of all the Smith family. Belasco said further that he needed one more fairy, and that he would engage Lillian for the part. It was a small part, but the best he had.

Lillian was delighted, Dorothy disappointed but not discouraged. They visited other managers, and some agencies. They decided to look up Gladys Smith, to see what could be done in that direction. Sure enough, the telephone book had it: "Biograph Co., 11 E. 14th St."

"Hello, hello! Is this the Biograph Company?"

"That's right. What's wanted?"

"We'd like to speak to one of your actresses, Gladys Smith."

"Sorry—no such person here."

"But we saw her in a picture of yours, in Baltimore."

"What picture?"

"'Lena and the Geese.'"

"Oh, that was Mary Pickford."

"Oh—oh, all right—can she come to the telephone?"

So that was who she was—Gladys . . . so much the better. Gladys, who was now Mary, came to the telephone, and after a brief period of wild greetings and inquiries, arranged to have them come to the studio.

Lillian and Dorothy, at the top of the outer step at 11 East 14th Street, found themselves in a wide hall, confronting a great circular heaven-climbing stairway that ascended to the unknown. A tall man with a large hooked nose was walking up and down, humming to himself. A boy took in their names, and presently Mary, brighter

and prettier than ever under her new name, appeared and flung herself into their arms. The tall man continued walking up and down, and now added some words to the tune he was humming: "She'll never bring them in—she'll never bring them in,"—a suggestion to Mary, who declined to take any such hint.

"Mr. Griffith," she said, "these are my friends, Lillian and Dorothy Gish. They were on the stage for years, in child parts, just as I was; I know you'll have something for them, here."

David Wark Griffith, director of the Biograph Company, stopped singing, shook hands and looked at them.

"Won't you come in?" he said.

They found themselves in quite a large room, in a violet glare of Cooper-Hewitt lights—weird, ghastly lights, that made living persons look as if they were dead—had been dead for some time. At one end of the room a group of people had assembled.

"You can begin right away," Mr. Griffith said, "as extras. We are arranging an 'audience.' You can be part of the audience."

And so in that casual way, their motion picture career began.

They "sat in the audience," and then sat in it again, and again and again, for it seemed that Mr. Biograph Griffith was not satisfied with just doing a thing once, and made you do it over and over until he was sure it could not be any better, even if he had to keep you at it most of the night.

Lillian and Dorothy got five dollars each, for that day, and felt very proud of it. Dorothy especially. She

had a grown-up feeling. Five dollars a day—a real job. But, alas, early next morning Lillian took her to a department store, and when the saleslady appeared, said:

“Have you a suit that would fit this little girl?”

But of course Lillian *was* a good deal taller, and then she was “going on sixteen.”

That day they had their first parts as regulars. At the studio, Griffith said he would rehearse them a little. He took them upstairs, and chased them here and there about a room, firing off a revolver. It seemed unusual, but did not alarm them. They had been through too much rehearsing, for that. Griffith wanted to see how they reacted under fire. “All right,” he said when they came down, “but they don’t know what it’s all about.” The picture he was making was “The Unseen Enemy.” At the climax, two sisters are trying to telephone for the police, while burglars in the next room are firing at them through a stove-pipe hole.

Lillian and Dorothy must have given a good account of themselves, for they were at the studio daily, after that, absorbing a new technique. They had no parts to learn. Mr. Griffith stood by the camera man and told them what to do. Just what to do. Every minute. That was altogether a novelty. On the stage you had to learn your part before you began. If you forgot your lines, a prompter helped you out, but he didn’t tell you what to do . . . never shouted at you, like Mr. Griffith, who on the whole was kindly . . . even amusing. He tied red and blue hair-ribbons on them, to tell them apart, though the resemblance was not striking . . . a fleeting thing . . . momentary. Lillian was “blue,” Dorothy “red,” because he said she was the spunky one . . . would talk back. Any-



DAVID WARK GRIFFITH



way, it was easier to call out directions to "Blue" and "Red." They got in three days on their first picture, and an extra night. Eighteen dollars apiece. That was riches. They lived in furnished rooms, at 424 Central Park, West.

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## II

### GRIFFITH'S GROUP OF PLAYERS

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THE "silent drama" had gone a good way by 1912, but had still a good way to go. There was not much yet in the way of "sets," elaborate construction of scenic effects. Griffith had invented, or perfected, the "fade-out," the "cut-back" and other devices still in common use, but he had built no castles or walled cities, no Bethulias or Babylons, had marshaled no battling armies. The Fourteenth Street studio was just a room, where one rigged up, as simply and inexpensively as possible, the hastily knocked together properties required at the moment. The costume wardrobe was notable for its scantiness—a collection to be picked over hopefully, and "made to do," or supplemented from a costumer's. Griffith had a curious old collector-man, always on the look-out for "good things," which were not always convincing. Too often the players had the appearance of being "dressed up" in whatever they happened to have, which was precisely the fact. It did not matter. Neither the public nor the producers took the "movies" very seriously, as yet . . . nor would they, for a year or so to come. They were still a cheap form of entertainment; something to be seen for ten or fifteen cents—even in the nickelodeons. The French were doing it better, then. Some of their films, their farces especially, were very good—light, chic—they were miles ahead of us in costume, scenario, settings, everything, until it became a question of money . . . ah, there we had them. And then the War came.



But I digress—an ancient sin. This is not a history of the motion picture, but only the story of a little girl, who grew up in a kind of dream . . . a land of make-believe . . . who wandered at last into a still more shadowy realm, became a picture player . . . by and by a *grande artiste*, with the world at her feet . . . who one day, in the fabric of her life, found me waiting to tell about it, and said:

“Oh, very well, if you think it worth while”; and I did, and do, think it worth while, and will let it go at that.

Sometimes Griffith took them out “on location,” and those were joyous days, for it meant green fields and running brooks, and wooded hillsides, though sometimes the work was strenuous, even wet, when one had to fall into the cold water and be rescued, especially when it had to be repeated a dozen times or so, to get it just right. On the whole, those were good days—picnic days.

Griffith’s group of players was a notable one. Besides Mary, Lillian and Dorothy, he had Blanche Sweet, “the Biograph blonde,” a real star, melting, luscious; Miriam Cooper, Mary Alden, Robert Harron, Henry Walthall, Lionel Barrymore—most of them young twenty years ago—*had* to be, to play anything like youthful parts, for all the indoor lightings were from overhead, the shadows were harsh and black—every line and wrinkle showed. There could be no retouching of the tiny film faces—the screen presented them not only as they were, but worse than they were, their defects magnified. Young girls like Mary and Lillian, even Dorothy, took grown-up parts:—the fairer and smoother their skin, the better the general result.

Slender youth had its disadvantages. Lillian was one day cast for the part of a vigorous young woman. The later, popular "boy form" was not yet appreciated. The public demanded a certain opulence in its heroines, especially in what was irreverently known as their "upper works." Griffith regarded Lillian thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid you're too young," he commented; "not filled out quite enough."

It was just luncheon time. The girls said nothing, but presently dashed out, and down Fourteenth Street, to a place where, in a show-window, they had noticed the desired contours for sale, substantial ones, firm and ample, of buckram.

A bite to eat, a trip to the dressing-room, and they were ready. Griffith, considering his cast, took another look at Lillian, rubbed his eyes, decided that after all she would do.

Thus was wrought the miracle of Fourteenth Street.

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### III

#### BELASCO DELIVERS A VERDICT

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NELL wrote that she was to become a mother. Lillian, awe-struck, replied:

I can't talk to anyone about it, not now. I want it all to myself for just a little while. . . .

I am with the Biograph, but none of my pictures have been released as yet; will let you know the names of them. I have signed with David Belasco for next season, and we open here in New York on Christmas Eve at Belasco Theatre. Although it is a good company, I have a very small part. I am going to do pictures on the side, so that is some help. . . . Well, I must get supper.

But she could not carry the Biograph work with her rehearsing. In November she wrote:

I was worked to death my last days at the Biograph, and then I was so excited when I started to rehearse in this new play that I couldn't even eat. The name of the play is "The Good Little Devil." It is a fairy play, and we open December 10, in Phila. and Xmas night in N. Y. I play Morgane, a fairy. . . .

Lillian enjoyed rehearsing when it did not last too long. There were some half-a-dozen of the fairies, and they flew—flew wonderfully, suspended on wires, pulled from somewhere below by eighteen strong Germans. She loved the flying sensation—so much that she would go before rehearsal-time and rehearse a little on her own account. She tried all the wires, and the big Germans delighted in sending her soaring into the air. In the play, she was the

"Gold Fairy," that flew highest. And there was one scene where she rested on a wall. Belasco, watching the rehearsals one day, was asked by a reporter what he thought of her looks. Belasco sent a glance at the slender figure on the wall, at the unearthly face surrounded by a tumbling mass of gold.

"Most beautiful blonde in the world," he said, and next day that label found its way into print and general circulation.

Not long ago—a month or two before he died—Belasco qualified—a little: He had not then, he said, seen *all* the beautiful blondes in the world. Perhaps he should have said: "*One* of the most beautiful." But as Belasco had seen a very great number of beautiful blondes—probably the pick of them—the verdict will be allowed to stand as reported, especially as it was never questioned. Lillian's beauty was not then what it became later:—as revealed in "The White Sister," for instance, in "Romola," in "La Bohême," and more recently in "Uncle Vanya."

"The Good Little Devil" did not follow any of the announced dates. It opened successfully in Washington, or Philadelphia, and was in Baltimore for Christmas. They gave two performances that day, during the second of which there was an accident—serious enough, though it might have been worse.

In the act where she landed on the wall, she left it with a step-down of six feet. The wire, of course, lifted her down, but in this performance something was wrong, and she literally stepped into space. The sickening, helpless feeling of expecting support and finding none! The fall made her quite ill; her understudy had to finish the play.

"I cried all night," she wrote Nell, "I was so lonely and broken-hearted."

She was apparently not injured, but terribly shaken; and then, the audience had laughed. Mr. Belasco hurried to her dressing-room to comfort her. The audience was not laughing at her, he said, but at the incident. She must not mind that; everything was going to be all right. It was, but the shock had weakened her.

Back in New York, with another hard siege of rehearsing, before the opening there. Griffith, as was his custom each winter, had taken his company to Los Angeles, Dorothy with them. Lillian, to save money, lived in a tiny room at the Marlton Hotel, in 8th Street, and with a Sterno lamp, cooked her food, which consisted of tinned things and tea. Weakened as she undoubtedly was by her fall, this was but poor nourishment on which to meet Belasco's strenuous rehearsals. January 8 (1913), she wrote:

It is now 3:30 in the morning of Wednesday, and I have just returned from a dress rehearsal. We open tonight, and everything has to be just so; we rehearsed until 4:30 yesterday morning.

Nell, I don't know how to thank you for what you have offered me. You both can't know how wonderful it is to have someone offer me a home, and how I would love to follow the desire of my heart and come to you. But I can't. I can't, because I have to make my way in this world from now on. Mother has worked all her life; surely, it's my turn, now. . . .

The picture you painted for me in your letter made me cry, because I was reading it in my dressing-room, and I happened to glance up at a mirror, and there I sat, all false, with paint and cosmetics covering my face, and it came to me what a distance it was from my life to yours.

Mary was getting a good salary, and had bought her mother a car. Lillian said to her, one day: "How happy you must be, Mary, to be able to give your mother so much." Her own weekly twenty-five dollars went such a little way. The room—one had to have a decent address—took so much of it . . . and clothes—one must make a decent appearance—and the extras! A new coat . . . a mistake . . . it looked well, but was not warm enough.

She was far from well, and knew it. Mrs. Pickford and Mary insisted on her seeing a doctor, who told them that she was threatened with pernicious anemia, and would die if she did not change her mode of living. They spoke about it to Belasco, who offered to send her to Florida at his own expense. When he learned that Griffith had offered her work on the coast, at double her present salary, he at once agreed to pay her fare to Los Angeles.

She hung on until the end of January—postponed until she was warned that unless she went at once, it would be too late. They did not tell her, but they were by no means certain that it was not too late already. So she surrendered. Belasco bought her ticket to Los Angeles; her mother was already on the way out there. Dorothy wrote of glorious California sunshine. It made her better to think of it.

And then, at the end, a tragedy: The eighteen strong Germans who pulled the wires, and adored her, went to the train with their own little brass band, to say good-bye. Ah, me, she had somehow told them the wrong station . . . a heartbreak . . . one that could not be mended.

She traveled by the Los Angeles Limited, and for the first time in her life, knew the full luxury of a Pullman. On the way, she wrote:

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I am going on and on, with miles upon miles separating us, it seems, but it is not so, dear, as we are just as near to one another now as we were in the old days, when we used to take "John Halifax" and go to your room, and read. Can you ever forget those days, and will they ever come back again?

. . . I am going to work hard out there, and next summer or fall, I am going back to Mr. Belasco.

But she would never go back—either to Nell, or Belasco. Four days later, she was in Los Angeles, earning a salary of fifty dollars weekly. The hard days were over.



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## IV

### A STUDIO ON PICO STREET

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CALIFORNIA sunshine, California Zinfandel—doctor's orders, fifty cents a gallon—open air and exercise—worked their miracle. The pictures were made out-of-doors—even the interior sets were on an outside stage, with daylight illumination—and there were many "Westerns," with riding.

In no time, Lillian, like Dorothy and the others, went racing over the hills behind Los Angeles—an Indian, a cowboy, a settler, a pursued heroine—sometimes all of those things in one day; for there was no star aristocracy in Griffith's troupe. One might be a star one hour, and an extra the next, and nobody cared, and everybody was happy, and Lillian grew well, and physically hardened to the demands of picture making—by no means light.

Her riding practice with the Indian girl at Shawnee came in handy now. A horse, even a wild one, had no terrors for her. In one of the early pictures, Lillian, with two men, Raoul Walsh and George Siegman, were chosen for some special riding. The horses were range ponies—one of them looked dangerous. The men regarded him doubtfully. Lillian said, "I'll take him." He seemed to her no worse than those she had ridden in Oklahoma.

They swept by the camera beautifully, but they were supposed to turn and do it again. The others turned, but Lillian's horse went on. His nose was toward the ranch. There were some trees and bushes, and he tore through them, to get her off his back.

Now, it happened that an Indian, a real Indian, named "Eagle Eye" lay asleep among the bushes, and the pounding hoofs awakened him. A real Indian knows what to do under such circumstances. He leaped straight from his nap, caught the mad pony's bridle, and the heroine was saved.

In another picture, she had to jump from a buckboard, behind a runaway team, to a cowboy's arms. Christy Cabanné was the director, and Bobby Burns, of the Burns Brothers who did most of the dangerous riding, was the cowboy rescuer. Lillian had no fear of the jump—her faith in Bobby was perfect—but the pony he was riding sank beneath the suddenly added weight, and nearly went down. "Closest and most dangerous thing I ever did," Bobby said when it was over.

Lillian loved California, and why not? It had given her a new freedom, and with it, her health. News came of the arrival of Nell's baby. Incredible to think of Nell with a baby! "Oh, Nell, does it really belong to you?" And a few lines further along, "This is a wonderful country! How I wish you could be here; it would do you so much good. It is just like summer, and they have wonderful mocking-birds and beautiful nights."

I do not know the name of Lillian's first California picture, nor the sequence of those that followed. Nobody today seems to remember these things, and they are not very important. There was a good deal of sameness about the Westerns, and most of them were that. "A Misunderstood Boy" was among the titles, "Just Gold," and "The Lady and the Mouse"; but as Griffith was turning out pictures at the rate of one, or two and even three, a week—

short films, in those days—these titles suggest no more than brief stages of preparation for the day a year or two later when he would begin to write the Greater Picture story across the screens of the world.

But they did something for Lillian and Dorothy: They taught them the technique and mechanics of film photography, in and out of doors, and their alert minds absorbed it as by instinct. It was only a little while until Griffith discussed his pictures with them, asked their suggestions. And something more: The public recognized their faces from the pictures of the previous summer, and began to inquire who they were.

One day Lillian was interviewed. Surely this was "coming on." The reporter had heard of Belasco's verdict; it had run ahead of her, and was known and repeated in California almost as soon as she arrived. The reporter wrote about Belasco, and then on his own account called her "Lillian, the adorable."

It was pleasant, of course, to be written of like that, but she wished he had said more about her pictures. She led the next reporter around to them, explaining that her work was the important thing. He asked her what one must do to be a screen actress, and quoted her as saying:

"To play for the pictures is mostly a matter of the face, and the inside. You have to learn to think, inside."

Being a young reporter, he was willing to believe that it was a matter of the face—*her* face: "A tea rose" he called it, "reflected in a moonlit mirror." Also he spoke of ivory, and pale jade, and of other things not closely related to acting.

There was no Hollywood in that halcyon day, no picture Hollywood. That "particularly irrational" corner of the universe had as yet neither name nor fame. The Biograph studio was in Los Angeles, on Pico Street, a building thought to be rather large, being one hundred or one-hundred-and-fifty feet long—a narrow shack, used chiefly as a carpentry shop, and for dressing-rooms—one each, for men and women.

As before mentioned, the photography was done on a stage set up outside, by daylight. There were sliding curtains above, like those in a photograph gallery, which is about all it was. The curtains controlled the sun, but the wind blew in and candles flickered, tablecloths waved ghostily, and occasionally something blew off the shelf, even in a "perfectly still" room. When it rained, they went into the carpentry shop and rehearsed. Often, the younger ones rehearsed while the older ones watched them. Always they rehearsed on rainy days. They spoke whatever words came into their heads, except during "silent rehearsals," when they were supposed to convey the meaning in pantomime.

Griffith wrote most of his own plays—scenarios—a good many more than he needed. He could not afford to have them tried out by expensive people, so he used helpers—extras, stage-hands, anybody—for preliminary rehearsals. Sometimes it happened that a very humble servitor put astonishing life and conviction into what he, or she, was doing, and Griffith was just the person to recognize it. Bobby Harron, a property boy, had been like that. And there would be many others, including Constance Talmadge, Wallace Reid, and Valentino. It was Dorothy who suggested giving a part to Valentino. Griffith de-

murred, on the ground that he didn't believe he would be popular with women—too "foreign-looking." Amazing conclusion! But "Rudy" was cruder, then. Perhaps Mencken's "catnip to women" would not have been so neat a turn.

They were a busy crowd in the Pico Street studio. Griffith had a vacant lot out back, and those not in the scenes were sent there to limber up—to practice running and walking, arm movements, a variety of gymnastic work, all in the direction of a better expression of emotions.

Long hours. For many of the pictures, they had to get up in the dark, to be "on location" by sunrise. Hard days in the field, home late, hot, hungry and ready for bed. And always, those not in action were rehearsing, rehearsing, rehearsing, or prancing up and down that deadly lot, making muscle for the next job.

They ate how and when they could. Something was taken along by those who went to the field. The others grabbed a sandwich or a plate of soup, or pie and milk, from the White Kitchen, a tiny nearby shack. Abbreviated luncheons were sometimes brought to the set—"studio food"—that is, something not messy, nor especially appetizing. Experimental luncheon-places were tried in the studio, but not very successfully.

There was nothing resembling dissipation among the Biograph group. On the contrary, there was an atmosphere of earnest study and thought. Stimulated by Griffith, himself a voluminous and inclusive reader, the young women, especially, rather put on airs in their devotion to research and philosophy: Nietzsche, Strindberg, Schopenhauer, Spinoza—these were their favorites. What time they found

to read them, it is difficult to see, now—nights and Sundays, perhaps. At all events, they did read them, or read at them, and discussed them feverishly during any spare moments. Blanche Sweet, Mae Marsh, Lillian and Dorothy, Miriam Cooper, Anita Loos—these chiefly were the students. Anita Loos was in the scenario department, and very keen, one of the best-posted. Anita discussed so much, and so capably, that Griffith called her “Madame Spinoza.”

When it happened that they made a picture that touched upon anything historic or geographic, they tried to “read up” for color, costume, background. Lillian reveled in such research; swiftly, eagerly, she added to her knowledge of the past, of life in general. The others were like that, too, more or less.

“Did those girls have sweethearts?” I asked Griffith, a little while ago.

“I don’t know; I don’t remember any. I don’t see where they would have found time for them. Today, stars and others make one big production, and have long waits between. We had nothing like that. We were producing every day. The demand was good, and not many companies. It was a different world.”

Such a little while ago . . . less than twenty years . . . just yesterday! But thinking of it now, and of all that has come, and gone, since then, it seems, somehow, a Golden Age.

I like to think of Lillian in that truly lovely environment, that “garden between dawn and sunrise,” among those wholesome, beautiful girls and those strong, handsome young men, all busy at a work which, however crude and inconsequential it may seem today, brought cheer and



comfort to the millions, then. I like to think of her and Dorothy dashing along the hillsides, on range ponies, as painted Indians, or whooping cowboys; I like to think of them with their mother, in their apartment at the Brentwood, digging into the books which now for the first time they could afford to buy—making up, as far as might be, for the insufficient years.

How starved they were for books! They would drop into a book shop for one, and come out with an armful. Before they knew it, they were acquiring a library. Life was becoming worth while. Lillian to Nell: "The world unfolds itself to me more and more every day, and sometimes it seems so bright; then it changes . . ."

For the most part she thought herself very well off—in a world where no one is more than passably happy—and increasingly devoted herself to her work.

She began to train her facial muscles to obey her, to reflect her thoughts. "You must think inside," she had told the reporter, by which she meant, I suppose, that one must do one's own thinking, rather than merely reflect the thought of the director, must persuade one's muscles—all of one's muscles and members—unconsciously to obey the inward thought. "Think inside and your trained body will take care of itself," might have been her creed. Not all players could adopt it. Some could hardly be said to think at all. Thought, the director's thought, filtered through them. Griffith found her always willing—eager—to listen—but not pliable. . . . More and more he left her alone. Lately he said—to the writer:

"Dorothy was more apt at getting the director's idea than Lillian, quicker to follow it, more easily satisfied with the result. Lillian conceived an ideal, and patiently sought



to realize it. Genius is like that: the ideal becomes real to it.”

From his lofty hotel window, David Wark Griffith looked out across the tops of Babylon. Reflectively, he added:

“She is the best actress in New York—the best I know. She has the most brains. Joseph Medill Patterson once said to me: ‘Lillian Gish has the best mind of any woman I ever met.’ But I knew that, already.”

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## V

### THE PATH TO STARDOM

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LILLIAN to Nell:

I want you to see "A Mothering Heart" . . . I cried and lost so much sleep over that picture, that I am sure you would like it.

When the picture was an important one, she rehearsed the whole night, sometimes, alone in her room, going over the scenes again and again. She never required "glycerine tears"—she lived the part too vividly. A good many years later, she wrote:

"The first important picture in which I appeared was 'The Mothering Heart.' This was noteworthy, not only because it was in two reels, but because the vast sum of eighteen hundred dollars had been spent in the making."

"A Mothering Heart" received gratifying notices: "Her best picture, thus far"; "Her lack of so-called acting is the secret of her success"; "Mr. Belasco said very little when he called her 'the most beautiful blonde in the world'"; "The hit of her career." All of which would indicate that those nights and days of rehearsal had not been wasted; also, that a picture "career" bore no very close relation to elapsed time.

There was some reason in this: fame of a sort had come to her with astonishing suddenness—the fame that comes to a striking face and personality, interestingly presented in a thousand towns and cities. It was like magic. She had

really done nothing of importance, yet she had a "career"—her name and face were widely familiar.

There began to be a sifting-in of "fan" letters—rather a new thing in the picture world. Admirers did not always know where to write. And there was something remote, something baffling, in the idea of writing to a picture; something suggestive of the bibulous young man, waiting at the back door of a movie-house "to take Mary Pickford home."

Then, more and more, the notices and the magazines gave addresses; the name of the producing company appeared on the title flash of the film itself, though it generally vanished and was forgotten before one had a chance to fall in love with the star. Still, the letters came, and the sift became a drift that in time would become an avalanche. Some were from children.

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Lillian to Nell:

Tomorrow we start on our last picture out here, "Judith and Holofernes," from the Bible story, a wonderful theme.

"Judith of Bethulia," as they finally called it, was Griffith's most pretentious undertaking up to "The Birth of a Nation," of which it was the forerunner. He took his players up to Chatsworth Park, a desert place in the hills, and set up an ancient walled city, engaged an army of extras, men, women, children, even babies. Also, expert riders and trained horses, and went into strenuous daily rehearsal. The "Park" was a place of sand and rock and cactus, a good way from Los Angeles. They went by street car, then train, finishing the trip by hay-wagon. They

got up at four or five o'clock, in order to be on the ground, dressed and made-up when the sun rose. Bottles of snake-bite antidote were issued to the players, for rattlers were very common there. An actress saw a coil of rubber tubing on a stump, and started to get it. It behaved curiously, and she lost interest—lost it at the rate of several miles an hour, until she was safely with the others.

It was June—the weather was blazing hot. They worked all day in the sun and dust, sweltering in Oriental garments, through the longest days of the year. When they got back to Los Angeles, it was dark, and they were hardly in bed before they had to get up again. As soon as the desert scenes were finished, Griffith packed up his players and set out for New York to finish the studio scenes there. In this picture, Blanche Sweet had the part of Judith, Henry Walthall was Holofernes. Lillian had a small part, a little Mother in Israel.

Only a little while ago, with Lillian, in a small New York projection-room, I saw "Judith and Holofernes" on the screen. I was amazed, and I think she was, at how good it was. The photography was excellent, would pass as such today: soft, brown in tone, with little of the jerkiness that came of the slow camera. Furthermore, the story was beautifully conveyed.

It was terribly dry, hot and dusty there, which took nothing away from the realism. The clouds of dust that rose from a battle scene gave a magnificence and mystery to the effect—a reality that was stirring, even today. It is easy to believe that an audience which had not yet seen "The Birth of a Nation," was awed by the spectacle.

There was a great deal of fine horsemanship. Horses

trained to fall, their riders flung far and wide, were not then so common. Blanche Sweet made a perfect Judith. Lillian's part, though small, was quite lovely. She was a little mother, running about, seeking water for the baby held always close to her breast. There were other babies in the picture. Babies were easy to get, then. There was no enforced law about it, and one could pick them up by the dozen, in Los Angeles, or anywhere—Mexican babies—with a little girl to look after them when not in use.

The studio scenes of "Judith" were not made in the old Fourteenth Street place. During the winter, the Biograph Company had built a vast, new studio uptown, at 175th Street, great floor space, and dressing-rooms for all. They had thought their crowded dressing-rooms in California inconvenient—just one for women and another for men, rather scambly and messy . . . long tables, with mirrors back to back, in the center . . . one side for the regulars, the other for the extras. Everybody thought the new place was going to be fine, but it wasn't. All the fun, the cozy, intimate comradeship, was gone.

Griffith was restless. Primarily, he wanted to get out of picture making, and write. He had written his way into pictures, now he dreamed of writing his way out of them. He was a poet at heart. He had a poem and a play to his credit, besides dozens of scenarios. All the time he wanted to settle down to writing.

It was no use. He couldn't settle down, even if they would let him, and they wouldn't let him. He was too good a director for that—the best—much the best in the field. Settle down! Preposterous! But he quit the Biograph

Company. They were niggardly about expenses; sometimes (often, in fact), he used his own money—and they had an economy complex in the matter of salaries. The Reliance-Majestic, a more recent organization, offered him a free hand. He went to them in October. With him went the Biograph players, almost in a body. A few were tied by contract, but the others went, Lillian and Dorothy among them.

Those young people had faith in Griffith, and loved him. Loved him when he raised their wages, loved him and were still faithful even when the day came, as presently it did come, when he was wading so deeply in the tide of battle and Reconstruction that attended "The Birth of a Nation," that he could not find enough to go around. They knew he would pay to the last penny when it was possible, and he always did. With or without wages, they would stand by.

The Reliance-Majestic Company had a studio on the Clara Morris estate, Yonkers; another at Sixteenth Street and Union Square, West. It is said that in less than an hour after Griffith had closed the Biograph door behind him, he was directing on Union Square a scene for a new five-reel picture, which he made in six days and nights, working constantly—all day and night. Perhaps he wanted to make a showing to the new company. Perhaps there was a need of quick money—usually there was.

In this new picture, "The Battle of the Sexes," Lillian was cast for the leading part: a daughter who suffers, and brings an erring father to repentance. In the beginning, it was called "The Single Standard," and in that pre-war moment, was thought to be rather risqué. Today, it would be a Sunday-school picture, dramatically and morally

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sued to Third Avenue, New York's remaining stronghold of respectability.

The cast included, besides Lillian, Mary Alden, Donald Crisp, Bobby Harron, Fay Tincher, and Owen Moore. In one scene, the climax, Lillian has a sixshooter ready for Fay Tincher, the vamp who has broken up the family. Her finger, however, refuses to pull the trigger. Her father, entering, finding her in this dubious association, asks: "You, my daughter, what are you doing here?" And the devastating reply: "You, my father, what are *you* doing here?" gives him something to think about. A notice says: "The sets were lavish, but above all, they were true to the higher social sphere." Third Avenue would adore it. "The Battle of the Sexes" was Griffith's first release for the Reliance-Majestic. There was a prologue and four reels; longer than "Judith of Bethulia."



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## VI

### "HOME, SWEET HOME"

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GRIFFITH had far greater battles in his mind. In January he severed regular connection with the Reliance-Majestic, but arranged, under their auspices, to produce a Civil War picture, based on Thomas Dixon's book, "The Clansman." Then, early in February, he took his entire group of players to the Coast, and began, not that picture, but pictures that would earn money for the undertaking. No one, not even Griffith himself, guessed the size of that undertaking, but better than the others, Griffith knew that it would require an overhead which would cause, among his backers, an outbreak of apoplexy, if they got even a hint of it.

Griffith had a bent for melodrama. Also, he knew there was money in it, and money was very necessary just now, in view of the big project ahead. It occurred to him that John Howard Payne's "Home, Sweet Home" had a more universal appeal than any similar composition in the nation's history. A story of the author's life, followed by a set of scenes using that old heart-throb as a call to the erring wanderer or comfort to the heavy-laden, would be irresistible. Walthall would be cast as Payne, Lillian as his sweetheart; at the end, a spiritual transition, as in "Uncle Tom."

At the Reliance-Majestic, or Fine Arts studio, on Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards, the work was pushed forward rapidly, to have the picture ready for Spring release.

In a full-page announcement of the big, new feature, we read:

"Twenty-five famous screen stars will participate in the play, which will be a very 'portentious' one."

Whether the printer meant to set "pretentious" or "portentious," is of small consequence. It was both. Griffith meant to make it the former. Payne, had he been consulted, would have voted for the latter, for in the picture, he dies and goes to Hell. That a poet, author of an immortal song, could have been sent to Hell, even temporarily, as late as the Spring of 1914, shows how far we have traveled since then. A newspaper symposium had abolished Hell a good while before that time, but perhaps Griffith hadn't heard of it yet. Griffith made Payne abandon his sweetheart, so doubtless it was proper that he should have a taste of Hell, even in 1914.

Then follow the "episodes": A young Easterner is about to forsake Mae Marsh ("Apple-pie Mary"), when the strains of "Home, Sweet Home" on an accordion, win him back to her "calico-covered arms." A business man's wife is about to "step out," when a "great musician" in the flat below strikes up "Home, Sweet Home," and a wife's honor is safe. The fact that great musicians so seldom play "Home, Sweet Home" as a pastime, did not trouble Griffith. His did.

The picture ended in a manner no longer to be taken seriously. Payne (Walthall), dying in sin, goes promptly to an impressive Hell, a chasm in the mountains, where, arrayed in an astonishing costume, considering the climate, he is given a disagreeable time by certain devils wearing the falsest of false faces. His sweetheart (Lillian), dying a saint, had gone straight to Heaven—a sort of grown-up

Little Eva. Must Payne remain in Hell? Not above a week, at the longest. "Little Eva," suspended on wires, as when she had been the Gold Fairy of Belasco, descends in a white robe, and her poor renegade lover, seizing the folds of that immaculate garment, is borne upward and outward to Paradise, backing away from the audience, so that their faces may never be lost. Probably only the beauty of Walthall and Lillian saved such a scene, even in that remote time, from the shouts of joy which would surely greet it today.

Seventeen years later, in the little projection room on Seventh Avenue, I watched, with Lillian, an unreeling of this ancient film. It seemed to me, as, I think, to her, pretty crude:—in places, childish. The costumes had been selected from an assortment something more limited than the old Biograph wardrobe, and were either amusing or pathetic, as you happened to think. The acting was not much better. I don't quite know what was the matter with it, but it conveyed the impression of being amateurish, though all the actors were, in effect, stars. Lillian's half-hysterical "Wasn't I terrible?" expressed one's general feeling as to all of them. Mae Marsh in a comedy part, was the best of the lot. The photography was on a par with the rest of it. Yet it followed "Judith of Bethulia" by several months. What *was* the matter?

And since we have been speaking of "Little Eva," perhaps this is as good a place as any to state that Lillian had never, at any time, played that part. She might have done so, had there been any "Uncle Tom" combinations when she was a child trouper. "Uncle Tom" had died permanently, by that time. Interviewers, however, when they looked at her, could not believe, when she told them that

she had played "Little Willie" in "East Lynne," that she was not saying "Little Eva in 'Uncle Tom,'" and they so often printed this statement that in time she almost believed it herself. I am making a special paragraph of this denial to set the matter straight—for all of us.

Busy days, these. Under one director and another, Griffith kept Lillian and Dorothy going, usually in different pictures, though sometimes, as in "The Sisters," together. They made an attractive pair, but Griffith could not afford to waste them on small pictures—"program" pictures—besides, it was not easy to get stories—picture stories—to fit.

Dorothy became a star on her own account, with Walthall in "The Mountain Rat," a Western; and in "The Mysterious Shot," with Jack Pickford, who had joined the movie forces. Jack, apparently, had conquered his old infatuation, for we hear nothing further of it. "The Rat" was Dorothy's first star part, and a very good one of its kind, being that of a red-light girl, considered then rather a daring portrayal for a girl of sixteen. All these were pot-boilers, while preparations for the great Civil War spectacle went forward.

They also kept the names and faces of Griffith's stars before the public—an important matter, for the field was getting full of producers—stars were being created almost overnight. Nor did Griffith let them get into a rut by working always under one director. Lillian, alternately under Christy Cabanné and Jack O'Brien, was receiving liberal training.

"Which would you rather work under?" a reporter asked.

"Both. Their methods are entirely different; I learn a great deal from each."

Interviews were very frequent, now, the reporters kind. They referred to Lillian and Dorothy as the "darlings of the screen," and they rarely failed to remember Belasco's verdict, which found its way even to Massillon. "MASSILLON GIRL CALLED THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BLONDE IN THE WORLD" made a three-column headline, with a picture of Lillian to prove it; as if everybody in Massillon hadn't known that, long ago.

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## VII

### "THE BIRTH OF A NATION"

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DAVID WARK GRIFFITH was the son of a soldier, and had been brought up on war tales. He believed the time had come when the talk that had been so vivid to his childhood, should be given form and motion—that the bitter struggle of four years, with its rankling sequences, should be presented on the screen.

From Thomas Dixon's "The Leopard's Spots" and "The Clansman," he outlined his scenario, and began work. The latter title was to be the name of the picture. The new, and far greater, title, "The Birth of a Nation," was not used until the film had been actually finished and shown. The story of this achievement—the first, and still, in many respects, the greatest, of war pictures—has many times been told. One or two paragraphs, however, from Robert Edgar Long's biography of Griffith, may not be out of place:

Six weeks of constant rehearsals preceded the taking of the first scene, and throughout the next six months required to complete the spectacle, so many things happened it would require an entire volume to enumerate them.

Among the most notable scenes in the finished production were the battle of Petersburg, fought by eighteen thousand men on a field five miles across; the march of Sherman to the sea, culminating in the burning of Atlanta; the assassination of President Lincoln in the crowded Ford's Theatre in Washington; the wild rides of the Ku Klux Klan, and the session of the South Carolina Legislature under the negro carpet-bagger régime.



Had Griffith guessed that the World War was coming, he would hardly have had the courage to begin. He had to assemble a vast horde of extras, horses, thousands of uniforms and Ku Klux gowns; arms; he had to construct breastworks, trenches—all the front of war; he had to do all this when a real war was sweeping Europe, and all prices, especially of the things he needed, soaring to the sky. Horses were the hardest. I do not yet see where he got them, when European agents were everywhere in search of just the horses he wanted.

And then the money: The treasurer of the Reliance-Majestic company must have believed that Griffith thought him the treasurer of the United States, the way he drew on him. Of course, there was an end to that: Griffith had to go outside for money and credit. One may imagine him buying all the white cotton in Los Angeles to make those Ku Klux gowns, most of it on credit. Long says:

It became a battle for dollars, and it is told that the determined Griffith himself actually went begging among the merchants of Los Angeles to get the final one thousand dollars with which to complete his work.

Most of Griffith's players went into the cast, as the rôles seemed to fit them. Of the female parts, Mae Marsh was supposed to have the best. Blanche Sweet was still held to be Griffith's chief star and as the part of Elsie Stoneman, the Northern girl who becomes the sweetheart of the Southern Colonel (Walthall), did not seem quite big enough for her, Griffith gave it to Lillian. At least, that is the way it is remembered, now. I think there were other reasons: In the first place, Walthall was of small stature, which accounts for his being dubbed the "little Colonel"





LILLIAN AND DOROTHY, DURING THE GRIFFITH PERIOD



in the play. Blanche was of ample proportions; the two were not a good match. For another thing, Griffith knew that Lillian's frail loveliness set against the big mulatto features of the villain of the piece, the man bound to possess her, would move the audience as would the face of no other member of his company. It is also just possible that Griffith, in the beginning, did not realize how big the part of Elsie Stoneman was to be. He had a fashion of making his play as he went along. Fifteen years later, he only said:

"When I gave Lillian a part in 'The Birth of a Nation,' I merely thought she could play it, without considering how well, or at least without thinking she would make anything special out of it, though of course, by that time, I knew she would do it in her own way."

The field work of the "Birth" was done at the Universal Ranch, a place of diversified scenery outside Los Angeles. The play itself was made at the Fine Arts studio, which consisted of an exterior stage like that on Pico Street—only, instead of a large building, a lot of little shacks served as temporary, very temporary, dressing-rooms. Any player so inclined could build one for his or her own use, and trim it and decorate it according to fancy. The roof was merely a piece of canvas, held in place—also according to fancy. It rarely rained.

At one side of the lot, was constructed the "street" on which fronted the Cameron Southern home, about which most of the play centred. There was not much in the way of scenic designing. A stage carpenter, Huck Wortman, one of the old-fashioned kind who chewed tobacco and cocked up his eye, was equal to most things. If Griffith wanted a village street, with a vine-covered cottage; or a

Southern mansion; or a hospital; Huck cocked an eye, shifted his quid, and said, "Aw right," and it was so.

As a Civil War spectacle, "The Birth of a Nation" will probably never be outdone. The battle-field, with its miles of hand-to-hand fighting; the assembling of the Klan—hundreds of them in white robes, mounted;—Lincoln's assassination—these things were more impressive than even the reality could have been, for no one of them was ever viewed in its entirety, or with deliberation, and it seems impossible that they should ever have been more real. Stirring, appropriate music, fitted by Griffith to the scenes, added a final thrill.

The negro aspects of the picture were not entirely fortunate . . . within the facts, but hardly within the proprieties. It attached no blame to the negro for the abuses of Reconstruction, but presented him in an unfavorable light. Negro political domination in the South was an evil growing out of the war—a war and an evil for which the negro was the last person to be held responsible, the last person to be reminded of them.

"The Clansman," as it was first called, was shown publicly at Clune's Auditorium, Los Angeles, on the evening of February 8, 1915, all the film colony of Los Angeles being present. Reports had been spread that there would be negro rioting, and the police were out in force. There was no trouble. The theatre was jammed. Here and there in the audience were negroes.

Following this presentation, a print of the picture was hurried to Washington, and shown to President Wilson, members of the Cabinet, and their families. A few days later, February 20, this print was run in New York, for

the censors, and others concerned. Thomas Dixon, author of the story, was present, and declared excitedly, to Griffith: " 'The Clansman' is too tame a title for what you have done. Let's call it 'The Birth of a Nation,' " which became its title, then and there.

On March 3, the picture was shown at the Liberty Theatre, New York City, at two dollars a seat, the first time a motion picture ever became a full-sized theatre attraction. Even so, it was in for a record run.

Lillian's success as Elsie Stoneman was a complete surprise to her, for she had not liked the part, and then it had dragged on so long. But when the notices poured in, she must have begun to wonder if anybody but herself and Walthall were in the picture. Their faces together, or hers alone, looked out from every page. From New York, Thomas Dixon wrote:

*My dear Miss Gish:*

I don't care to tell you all the beautiful things I'd like to say about you and your exquisite work in our picture. . . .

Between the acts, last week, a distinguished young man of letters—editor of a great magazine—found me in the lobby, dragged me one side and whispered "For God's sake, tell me quick, who is the glorious little girl playing Elsie?" I answered, "Miss Lillian Gish." "I want to meet her right away! Where is she?" he gasped.

He's only one of many hundreds. How can I ever thank you for such work? Believe me it belongs to the big things in life for which money never pays. I am your debtor for services, for which I not only could never pay but don't know how to thank you. . . .

Sincerely,

THOMAS DIXON.

Dorothy fortunately had no part in "The Birth of a Nation"—fortunately, because she was overtaken by an accident when the picture was well under way. Of course, it was just a coincidence that a fortune-teller, only a little while before, had warned her against an automobile accident. Anybody could do that. Nevertheless, he *had* warned her—and she *would* walk across the street where automobiles were passing. On that particular day—it was Thanksgiving—she had been lunching with Griffith and Mae Marsh and Miriam Cooper, and coming out of the restaurant, held to Griffith's coat, demanding that he buy her something.

"Oh, Mr. Griffith, please buy me some candy, Mr. Griffith. Please buy me some chewing gum. Oh, Mr. Griffith—please——"

They were crossing a street just then, the Boulevard, crowded with cars—the others a little way in advance of Dorothy. She never knew quite what happened, but in the wink of an eye, she was down on the ground on her face; a car that had struck her in a variety of places—was standing with its front wheel between her feet, one of which it had crushed.

Dorothy's disaster was not all sorrow. Lillian was with her most of the time. Friends were willing to entertain her steadily. Griffith had a miniature screen installed, with a projection machine, and gave her a private view of so much of "The Birth of a Nation" as was then complete. No damaged young queen had ever been so royally entertained. In a reasonably brief space, she was on her feet—limping for a time, but otherwise as well as ever.



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## VIII

### "INTOLERANCE"

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THE Griffith lot was at 4500 Sunset Boulevard, on the edge of Hollywood, then a residential suburb, named for one of the earliest homes there. Hollywood residents observed with curiosity, but with no special alarm, the interesting picture-making plants that were appearing here and there in their neighborhood. California has a taste for publicity:

"Ladies and gentlemen, since there seems to be nothing further to be said for the Dear Departed, I should be glad to make a few remarks about California."

That Griffith, on the very edge of Hollywood, had made the great picture then sweeping the country, was something on which to "make a few remarks," though it is unlikely that even the most sanguine residents guessed that within a comparatively brief time, their little suburb would become the center of one of the world's richest industries; a collection of amazing architectural construction; a strange, irrational region, in and about whose environs frail cities and quaint villages, fair palaces and weird ships and oceans, would appear and vanish, beyond the dreams of all the fairylands of time and change; that with these things would assemble an exhibit of feminine loveliness and masculine perfection, of human freaks and human vanities, such as probably no other planet could show.

The change began quickly enough, now. There was money to be made in Hollywood—not only by producers, but by actors. On Broadway, men and women with lean



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parts, or no parts at all, turned their eyes westward. The exodus set in. The word "Hollywood" began to be passed about like some magic bauble, a talisman. Once more, California held out to men and women a lure of gold.

The little group of players on Sunset Boulevard hardly knew what to make of the first incursion of "real actors" that swept in upon them. They had two ideas about it: they wondered if they would be able to keep their jobs, and if so, would they learn how to act. They realized, presently, that it made very little difference to them. They did keep their jobs, and they did not learn how to act—not in the stage way. It was the newcomers who had to learn—if they stayed.

Most of them did stay—adapted themselves. Producers with new, big undertakings, were all about. Griffith himself, returning from first showings of the "Birth," began on what promised to be a still more important, more expensive, picture.

It started as rather a small venture, with Mae Marsh and Bobby Harron in the leading parts. It was to be called "The Mother and the Law," based upon a famous murder case, wherein an innocent man, through intolerance—man's inhumanity to man—was brought to the foot of the scaffold.

Lillian was not to have a part in this new play. For one thing, she was working in another picture—as Annie, in "Enoch Arden"—one of the best of her early films—and in Richard Harding Davis' story of "Captain Macklin." And then, Griffith perhaps did not think it wise to push her forward too fast.

But one night, after a day of hard rehearsal, he picked

up a copy of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," and his eye caught:

. . . endlessly rocks the cradle,  
Uniter of Here and Hereafter.

He saw a picture: a girl—Lillian—endlessly rocking the cradle of humanity, binding the ages together—ages of human intolerance.

Feverishly, he mapped out a new scenario, far-reaching, comprehensive, covering the great episodes of intolerance: back through the religious wars, with the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, through the Crucifixion, back to the days of Belshazzar, tyrant of Babylon. Beginning with the modern story, he would lead it through episodes of tyranny and bloodshed, down to the blind cruelty and intolerance of today. And always, between, that young mother, endlessly rocking the cradle of the child who, in every age, must pay the price.

The preparations for "Intolerance," as the new production was now called, were architecturally far more pretentious and costly than those for "The Birth of a Nation," or for any spectacle play up to that time. Gigantic plaster elephants rose a hundred feet above the street level; the towering buildings of Babylon stretched, a profile of ancient Asia, across the sky. Nubian lions roared; a motley assemblage of Persians, Egyptians, Babylonians, priests, dancing-girls, charioteers, and fifty-seven other varieties, gathered for rehearsal. Says Griffith's biographer:

The luncheon hour "on location" composed one of the most picturesque sights ever witnessed by human eyes. At times there were as many as fifteen thousand men, women and chil-

dren scattered about the various lots during the noon hour. Thousands of horses and sheep grazed along the green enclosures, their shaking heads mingling with the flashing swords and helmets of the fighting-men.

When the great mob scenes were being photographed, it seemed as though the entire population of Los Angeles had come out to Griffith's place, to take part in the various pageants and mighty rushing armies. Actors from other studios—many of them prominent stars—joined in the scenes.

The writer assures us that in spite of the fierce conflicts waged on the parapets and walls and towers, only sixty-seven players were injured, and these but slightly; also that a modern field hospital, with surgeons, nurses and ambulances, was maintained.

Actors whose names were well known, or have since become so, first appeared on the screen in "Intolerance": Count Erich von Stroheim, Frank Bennett, Tully Marshall, Constance Talmadge. Constance was an extra, used at first for rehearsal, but presently—in the "Mountain Girl who worshipped Belshazzar from afar"—Griffith could see only Constance, so gave her the part.

Griffith had money to work with, now, and spent it like Belshazzar himself. "Intolerance" required a year and a half to make, and an expenditure of nearly two million dollars.

Some of the items are impressive: A jeweled costume for the "Princess Beloved" cost seven thousand dollars; the dancing-girls at the feast of Belshazzar, twenty-thousand—a good deal more than they ever cost that early Belshazzar, even in his palmiest days, but of course these were war prices.

"Intolerance" was shown for the first time at the Lib-

erty Theatre, New York, September 6, 1916. Its magnificence impressed the public. What wouldn't Griffith do next? On the night of April 6, 1917, Griffith personally presented "Intolerance," at the Drury Lane Theatre, London.

On that day, the United States entered the World War.

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## IX

### THERE WERE NO LOVE AFFAIRS

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LILLIAN did not consider that she was really in the new picture. To Nell she wrote: "I am not in it in person, but my heart runs all through it—and it seems more to belong to me than all my other work together." As of course it did—the mother who, through the ages, rocked humanity's cradle.

She had made a number of smaller pictures, meantime—very good pictures, if we consult the notices, which even sometimes forgot to remember that she was the "most beautiful blonde in the world." How tired she had become of that phrase! "If they want an angel on a wire, they send for me," she told one reporter, who managed to omit Belasco, though he did call her "a young goddess" and a "daffodil." You couldn't stop them.

The pictures she made at this time were important only as they were steps of development—program pictures, little remembered today. "Diane of the Follies," in which she played a kind of vamp and wore remarkable costumes, was more memorable.

"But Diane was very easy to play," she said afterwards. "Anybody can play a character of that sort—it plays itself. It is the part of a good woman, whose colorless life has to be made interesting, that is hard."

Her own life could hardly be said to be exciting. There were no love affairs. Plenty of opportunities, but she was always too busy for such things, or for the social life, of which there was now a good deal. "I was not gay enough

for the parties; Dorothy was sought, for those. They didn't care much about me." And once she wrote:

"When Dorothy goes to a party, the party becomes a party: When I go to a party, I'm afraid it very often stops being a party. . . . She, as I once heard a girl described in a play, is like a bright flag flying in the breeze.

"All music, even the worst, seems so beautiful to her. All people amuse her. . . . I have fun, too, but it is only the fun I get out of apparently never-ending work."

It was true, though: Work was her "fun"—work and study—always a book under her arm: often a French one.

And being kind to those about her—that was fun, too. She never failed to acknowledge the smallest service—from the electricians, the stage-hands, the humblest property-boy. A friend of those days writes me:

"It was not only that Lillian was courteous to the electricians and the rest; many actors are that . . . she was just another workman. She happened to be before the camera, that was all."

The little Gish family had never lived in a house, always in an apartment: in the Brentwood Apartments, and in the La Belle. But in the autumn of 1915, they leased Denishawn, home of the dancer, Ruth St. Denis, fitted for a school, plainly furnished, with dancing-floor, horizontal bar and other equipment, all of which strongly appealed to Lillian, who had been studying with Miss St. Denis, and could continue her work there.

The owner had left the beginnings of a menagerie, which they completed. At Christmas time that year, most of Lillian's friends gave her live things. A partial census shows an owl—one-eyed, gray—eight Japanese finches, two parrakeets, love-birds, two or three canaries, one little



poll-parrot; another, "John" (who, in 1932, still survives); also, squirrels, a pair of golden pheasants, and a pair of peacocks that Miss St. Denis had left.

They did not remain in Denishawn; the next paragraph explains why. Lillian to Nell:

We have moved from that huge house I told you about. We were there eight months, and during the last four, we had four burglars. One was so bold as to come in through the dining-room window, all the way upstairs into Mother's room, at the improper hour of 2:30 in the morning.

Being an old house with many squeaks, Mother knew all about him before he made his appearance, and greeted him with two bullets, the first of which hit the ceiling (she would have been terrified if she had hit *him*), and the second went through the railing in the hall. However, the man ran away, and the police never did catch him. All this time I was out on the sleeping-porch, petrified—could not utter a sound or move an inch. Oh, I am very brave. Imagine, Nell, being awakened from a sound sleep by your Mother tearing through the house, shooting a gun.

So they went back to apartments, permanently, as they believed.

Mrs. Gish was not very well, and wanted only to have peace. She was something of a financier; her business experience partly accounted for that, though she was a natural economist.

"Your salaries," she told Lillian and Dorothy, "are not income, but merely an exchange in money for your natural capital of youth and health. Salaries are capital, and all above actual needs should be invested as such. The returns you get from investment are income."

Lillian and Dorothy were making very good salaries. The day of spectacular earnings had not yet arrived, but





LILLIAN AS ELSIE STONEMAN, IN "THE BIRTH OF A NATION"



two hundred and fifty or three hundred dollars a week left a margin for banking. The little troupers who had received ten to fifteen dollars a week, and lived on less than half of it, began to feel themselves capitalists. This friend and that suggested wonderful "buys," and exhibited dividend slips. Then the "olive grove" epidemic broke out. Everybody was investing in olive groves, certain that every ten dollar share of stock would be worth hundreds within a few years. Lillian considered this prospect, with prayer and palpitations. The beautiful gray-green olive groves were certainly very nice. She had a balance of three hundred dollars, and one day hesitantly subscribed for that amount of stock. The palpitations grew worse. Olive groves! Why, it would take ages, and there would be so many olives, nobody would buy them. Besides, Lillian found she needed the money. She went to the office of the olive growers, and stated her case. A stout, good-natured man there listened quietly, regarded her thoughtfully, and returned her investment. What an escape—the others did not get their money back, and to date, dividends are shy.

By and by, when the three hundred had grown to as many thousand, another epidemic was in the air. Oil! Everybody caught it, including Bobby Harron, who was terribly in love with Dorothy and anxious to make the whole Gish family rich. Mrs. Gish shook her head. There was a tract of land which she thought promising. Lillian took a look at it, and was unfavorably impressed. It was just dirt—unbeautiful with weeds, and depressing tin cans. Bobby's oil stock looked valuable, and had an attractive name, something patriotic, like "Uncle Sam," or "Union Jack." There is a superstition that any such name is a

hoodoo, but Lillian and Bobby did not know this—not then. When Bobby pulled out his next dividend, Lillian fell.

That was about all: dividends hesitated after that, finally forgot to arrive. The stock that she had bought around 60, was quoted around 3. Bobby said it would “stage a grand come-back,” but to date it has not done so. Bobby was a sweet soul, and they thought none the less of him. “John,” the Gish parrot, to whom they had vainly tried to teach some proper things to say, acquired for himself the disconsolate wail: “Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

“*Why* do you suppose he does that?” Lillian asked Harry Carr, a Los Angeles newspaper man, of whom we are likely to hear again.

“That’s easy,” said Carr, “he is discussing oil stock.”

And the land? The dirt? Well, a lot of foolish people began to buy it and to cover up the weeds and things with houses, which made a lot of other foolish people want it, until its price increased ten, twenty, an-hundred-fold!

## THE NIGHTMARE OF WAR

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GRIFFITH, in England, wrote that he had wanted to enlist, but was being urged by English officials, Lloyd George and others, to do a war picture as propaganda. He might send for Lillian, soon.

"Intolerance" had made a stir in London, and the war situation had made a stir in Griffith. Like his ancestors, he wanted to carry a gun—to go into the trenches and pull a trigger. Lord Beaverbook said to him:

"That is nonsense. You can do a thousand times more for the cause by making a picture that will show the need of American intervention on the largest possible scale."

Griffith already had a story in mind—one he had planned on a night when he had been reading of the German desolation of Belgium and the French frontier.

"We will help you," Lloyd George and other high officials told him. "We will give you the use of our soldiers and training camps; we will put you on the front lines in France."

Griffith was ever a wary person. Never one to close a door behind him . . . to make an irrevocable decision, to fire until charged and primed. He wrote Lillian that he was looking for a location in Paris, guardedly adding that he would not begin work until the war ended. On the strength of which, Lillian, by this time in New York, paid a brief, happy visit to Nell, then living on the "Blue Dog Houseboat," at Miami.

Two weeks later, with her mother, she was on her way

across the Atlantic. In eight days they were in Liverpool where they sat down to wait for Dorothy. It was not decided when they sailed that Dorothy was to have a part in the new picture.

Dorothy sailed May 28. With her was Bobby Harron; also, Griffith's faithful camera man, Gottlieb Wilhelm Bitzer, a terrible name to carry into England and France. The ship was the *Baltic*—General Pershing and staff aboard.

"Tell me," Pershing said to Dorothy, "how one can learn to face calmly a moving-picture camera." Everyone is afraid of something.

The *Baltic* zigzagged across the ocean in thirteen days. Lillian and her mother became frantic, waiting. Dorothy, arriving, was shocked at her mother's appearance. Her face was haggard with anxiety. Then, presently, they were on their way to London.

It was the first time any of them had been abroad. England in June: the tiny fields, the trim hedges, the stately trees, the thatched villages—picture-book land. At London they went directly to the Savoy Hotel, and were given a room on the Embankment, overlooking the Thames. Little did they guess what they were to see from those windows. All seemed quiet enough. They did some sight-seeing.

A few days later, they had a call from a post-office official, concerning a package from America. A courteous man, they asked him about the raids, on London. There would be no more, he said. The Zeppelins had proved easy targets, the Germans would not send them again. And he added: "Don't mind if you should hear gun-fire at eleven o'clock; that will be our anti-aircraft gun practice."



MRS. GISH AND "HER GIRLS"

Mary Pickford, Mildred Harris, Mrs. Gish, Dorothy and Lillian





Barely were the words out of his mouth, when there came a far-off boom from the eastward. He looked at his watch. "Very extr'ord'nary," he said, "they are beginning the practice half-an-hour ahead of time." A moment later, he was gone.

The firing kept up. Lillian and Dorothy ran down the corridor, to a balcony. A waiter, passing, told them that the East End was being raided. He let them look through his binoculars. High in the air, to the eastward, one could make out a small, black speck—eighteen thousand feet up, he said.

They hurried down and got into a taxi, to see the raid. On the way to Whitechapel, they came to a post-office which had been struck. A corner of it was blown off—a number of persons killed. A great crowd had collected. They were told that much greater damage had been done in Whitechapel. They found there a schoolhouse, where ninety-six children had been killed. Crazed mothers swarmed about, looking for fragments of their dead.

Other bombs had fallen in the neighborhood. People were insane from grief. A schoolmaster carried out his own child. A woman standing near had just discovered that her boy was among the victims. Her face was distorted—it was as if someone had pulled it out of shape.

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## XI

### UNDER FIRE

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WITH the one thought of getting out of London, Mary Gish and her daughters went to Cambridge. But Cambridge, too, had been raided. At night, streets and houses were pitch dark. No anti-aircraft guns. No protection of any sort.

Two nights satisfied them. They returned to London, where for ten days it was quiet enough. Then, one morning, Mrs. Gish, Lillian and Dorothy, were awakened from sound sleep by a terrific explosion. They ran to the windows. Coming up the Thames, in perfect formation, were twenty German planes, flying in what seemed a slow and majestic manner, dropping bombs as they came. They were so low that one could distinguish the crosses on the under side of their wings. Mrs. Gish and her daughters watched them, fascinated.

Were they afraid? Undoubtedly they were: with death hovering in the air, likely to come plunging down at any moment, not many of the race—a race blessed, or cursed, with imagination—could be wholly indifferent. The rest of the party—Griffith, Bobby Harron and Gottlieb Wilhelm Bitzer—came crashing in.

They supposed the planes would drop bombs on Waterloo Station, and especially on the Hotel Cecil, headquarters of the English Flying Corps, its roof covered with anti-aircraft guns. The Cecil was near them—next door. Nothing of the kind happened. The German planes, undisturbed by the shells fired at them, circled slowly around

the Houses of Parliament, without dropping a bomb; then, turning, left London. This was on Saturday, July 8, 1917. The papers next morning reported thirty-seven dead, one hundred and forty-one wounded—numbers probably minimized. The Griffith party was shaken, dazed. It seemed incredible that in a world supposedly civilized such things could happen.

There was no longer any rest. Raids came at night, and in relays. One followed another—two and three in one night. They were meant to break the English morale.

The first night raid was by glorious moonlight. Mrs. Gish, Lillian and Dorothy, sitting in their apartment about ten, heard a distant booming, then a far-off voice calling: "Take cover—take cover!" They merely sat there, while the bombing came closer and closer, with aircraft guns going. By and by it was over. Next morning, they heard that less damage had been done than before, but enough.

About two nights later, as the girls stood in front of a dressing-table, in their nightgowns—Mrs. Gish already in bed—there came from just under their windows such an explosion as could not be described in words. The electric lights in the bathroom went out—windows were shattered. They rushed into the hall. All on that floor were there, in wild confusion. They called to one another that the hotel had been struck. Then, from outside, came a man's scream. They had never realized how terrible a man's scream could be. Cries and groans followed. They stared their inquiry into one another's faces.

The bomb, they learned, had struck just by Cleopatra's Needle, a few yards distant. It had hit a tram and killed eleven persons, wounding many others. The conductor

had had his legs blown off. It was he who had screamed, no doubt. Other bombs had fallen nearby. One on the little Theatre on Adelphi Terrace; another at the Piccadilly Circus; still another by Charing Cross Hospital. They had heard none of these, because of the concussion in their ears from the one that had fallen beneath their windows.

Lillian and Dorothy crept into one bed, shaking, unable to sleep. At four they got up, dressed, saw the dawn breaking over London—workmen going to their jobs. On the street, they found that many windows had been blown from shops, the glass so finely shattered that it was like snow. The girls said little, but listened to the comments of the working people—comments not pleasant to hear.

The raids now came regularly. The nights became hideous nightmares. Lillian and her mother seemed to get their nerve back. When the raids came, they would take their pillows and go into their little foyer, to try to get away from the noise. Dorothy took her pillow, too, but she did not sit on it—she hugged it. Finally, it was September. They had been there three months!

“. . . You cannot imagine, Nell, what terrible things those big things in the sky are, dropping death wherever they go. If this war would only end. . . . I am still here, and will live to see you and Tom and the babies again, in spite of it. So don't worry.”

Lillian went out a good deal, and, as was her habit, made a study of the people . . . to see how they acted under the stress and agony of war. She went to the Waterloo Station, to watch them saying good-bye. Always she was watching . . . on the street . . . everywhere.

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## XII

### FRANCE

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DAYS . . . nights . . . they seemed to have passed out of any world they had ever known, into a sinister, topsy-turvy world, where murder and destruction ruled.

Griffith down on the Salisbury plain, where there were great camps, was already making portions of the picture. Returning, at last, to London he escorted his little party down to Southampton, to take boat for France. It was a transport, crowded with soldiers. Mrs. Gish and the girls were in one tiny room, two in one bunk. Twice they started, and were sent back because of floating mines. Finally they were at Havre, and next evening at Paris, at the Grand Hotel.

Paris was dark—a place where almost anything could happen—but Griffith and the girls somehow managed to grope their way about, to the river and elsewhere. By daylight they did some shopping.

Griffith got the papers that would permit them to go to the fighting area; then, one morning, with Mrs. Gish, Lillian and Dorothy, and Bobby Harron, set out in an automobile, passed through the gates of Paris. In an article for a home paper, Lillian described their journey:

Paris still has gates, just as you read about in the romantic novels. There is a particular gate that leads to the war zone and not a single, solitary human being can go through it unless he is a soldier, or one who has business in the zone.

Can you imagine how important you feel when you go through that gate? You find it very hard to believe that you

are not just acting in a "movie," in a Los Angeles background that Mr. Huck, the man who builds the moving-picture sets, has built—the road and everything.

And how you do go! By tall poplar trees, by long fields of France. France! Why, the very name is a poem and a romantic novel, all by itself. Lombardy poplars! It sounds like an old-fashioned song.

Through the fields are the long lines of barbed wire. That is where the trenches are. The very trenches that used to defend Paris. Then, after fifteen minutes' ride, you are where the French stood in defense of Paris. . . . This is where the Germans were. They came this far. This very road . . . these very trenches are where the men were.

But now you see the first town that the Germans bombed. You come to the same kind of houses, blown all to pieces, wreck and ruin everywhere. In one second-story, there was part of a bedstead still left, and pieces of bed-clothes, that no one had taken the trouble to pick up, after the French had come back. I can write about it, and I can talk about it, and you can read about it, until you are old and gray and sit in a rocking-chair, but you could not understand it unless you saw it. Just streets, muddy and deserted, and little graveyards of houses, hundreds of them.

You may not know it, but if you have been in one raid, or one bombardment, where you hear the explosions coming closer and closer, and you shake and shake and tremble and get sick at your stomach, and dizzy, and lose your mind with fear, every moment, you can imagine what it was to these people who had to endure it for hours and days, and finally had their whole places blown away.

Were they running down the road we have been on, when this happened? Sometimes they would not leave, because they did not know where else to go. They could not believe it was true, anyhow, and they stayed and stayed on.

The farther they went, the greater the desolation. They worked in Compiègne and Senlis, and anyone who visited



that neighborhood, even as late as 1921, can form a dim idea of what it must have been in 1917. Ruin everywhere, broken homes; furniture in fragments, and scattered. Pieces of everything; clothing, little playthings, bits of lace, scraps of another existence.

To the eastward, the guns were always going. All that part of France was still subject to bombing raids. There were days when it was necessary to take refuge with a little French family, in a bomb cellar. Lillian wrote:

I have been in cellars myself, with a lot of other people around, frightened to death, sitting close to Mama and Dorothy, who had the shakes and whimpered as she used to when she was a baby, because it was so terrible.

They learned a number of things: they learned to tell enemy planes, to know shrapnel by its gray drift of smoke. They did not remain long in that sector—only long enough to get the required pictures. Griffith went to the front line, and made trench scenes—in the line itself. Then directly they were all back in London, in the raids again. Apparently they had not stopped . . . they would never stop.

One night when the planes had been over three times, the noise was so terrific that Dorothy suggested they go down into one of the ballrooms. They found English officers and ladies strolling about, calm in their English way, apparently not greatly concerned by the raid which was still going on. Dorothy, nervously watching, saw a lovely girl about her own age, come in. They looked at each other, at first without speaking. Then the girl said:

“You are an American, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

"So am I," and they fell into each other's arms.

They spoke of the horrors of the raids—of the one then going on. Finally, Dorothy said:

"One thing I'm thankful for, I'm soon going back home, and will get away from all this."

The girl's eyes grew big. She said:

"You are going back! And you are not afraid?"

"Afraid? After all this? At least, if one is hit by a torpedo, it's direct, and sure, and soon ended. In a raid like this, you never know."

But the girl said:

"I can never imagine crossing the water again."

"Why?"

"I was on the *Lusitania*, coming to England with a chaperon, to meet my fiancé. I clung to a deck-chair for four hours. My chaperon was drowned right beside me."

Dorothy, telling of it afterwards, said:

"I did not know her name—I do not know it now. She never knew mine. She had a look in her eyes she will carry the rest of her days."

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## XIII

### "HEARTS OF THE WORLD"

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OCTOBER found them safely home. After all their wish to get there, America seemed a poor place: uninteresting, flat, tepid, futile—its people had little idea of what was going on, "over there." No wonder the returning soldiers could not settle down to a humdrum life of work. It was a thing next to impossible.

Mary Gish and her daughters found their nerves on a tension. Blasting in the street made them jump. The strain had been terrible. Mrs. Gish had lost thirty-five pounds—she would never be quite the same again. Dorothy, by her own statement, had lost ten pounds. "Lillian is brave; besides, she couldn't afford to lose. She gained a whole pound." Lillian had no desire to go back, yet was sorry it was all over. Sometimes, looking back, it seemed to her that she had been dreaming.

"Hearts of the World" was shown for a tryout at Pomona, California, on Monday, March 11, 1918, and during the rest of the week at Clune's Auditorium, Los Angeles.

Both Lillian and Dorothy had studied and worked very hard for this picture, and it had been obtained at the risk of their mother's life and their own. It deserved success, and it had it. Lillian, as the heroine of the story, captured and mistreated, gave a beautiful and pathetic presentation of her part. Dorothy, "the Little Disturber," a strolling singer, had a rôle suited to her gifts. A lute under her arm, she romped through the war scenes with a jaunty swagger,

which, set to music, was irresistible. A London street-girl had provided the original. Lillian discovered her one day, and followed her about, to copy her artistic points. Bobby Harron was the hero-lover of the story—a very good story, on the whole—though it was the ravage and desolation of war that was the picture's chief value.

On April 4, "Hearts of the World" was presented at the 44th Street Theatre, before an invited audience. When, on the following evening, the theatre was opened to the public, seats sold by speculators brought as high as five and ten dollars. There were long runs everywhere. In Pittsburgh, the picture broke all records for any theatrical attraction in that city.

The writer of these chapters saw the film at this time, and again, with Lillian, in 1931. A good deal of it was remembered vividly enough. It had been the first World War picture, and it remained one of the best. The trench fighting was terribly realistic. There were scenes taken on the field that were war itself. Always, the action is swift. Toward the end of the picture, where Lillian and Bobby are defending themselves against a German assault, it becomes fairly breathless.

Throughout, the picture has a tender quality, in spite of its cruel setting. But there are exceptions to this, one especially: Lillian in the hands of a German, whipped because she cannot handle a big basket of potatoes.

"Did the beating hurt?" I asked.

"Terribly. I was padded, but not nearly enough. My back bore the marks for weeks. Mother was fearfully wrought up over it."

She approved the picture, as a whole. Thought it better

than many of those made today. She was not far wrong. There was more sincerity of intention—more earnest work. At one place, the heroine, through the shock and agony of war, becomes mentally unhinged. Lillian's portrayal of the gradual approach of this broken condition was as fascinating as it was sorrowful.

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## XIV

### "BROKEN BLOSSOMS"

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LILLIAN was entering a period of super-effort and success. Effort, especially—at first. The indefatigable and relentless Griffith kept them going, night and day. Hardly had he launched one war picture till he made another. He had much war film left, and he built another story around it. Two, in fact, though the second came somewhat later. While in England, Queen Alexandra and a number of titled women had lent themselves to the cause, by posing in arranged groups before the Griffith cameras. In "The Great Love," these films were used. "The Romance of a Happy Valley," and "True Heart Suzie" followed, idyllic countryside pictures, with Lillian in tender comedy parts.

Griffith no longer directed her—not really. "I gave her an outline of what I hoped to accomplish, and let her work it out her own way. When she got it, she had something of her own. Of course, she was imitated. A dozen actresses would copy whatever she did. They even got themselves up to look like her. She had to change her methods."

What a joy to work for Griffith! At night, in bed, you thought out your part, and mentally rehearsed it—over and over. Then, next day, you tried it, and when at last it was "shot," you eagerly looked, a day or two later, for the "rushes," to see what you had done. Sometimes it was pretty bad—not at all what you had expected. Never mind, that was the advantage of playing for the pictures: you could see yourself, and correct your mistakes. You

could do it over and over—Griffith was never stingy with film. He nearly always made twenty times what he used. He would let you try, and keep trying, until both you and he were satisfied. He knew that you had studied the lights, and angles, and groupings—that you had something definite in mind. Often, he consulted you—sometimes let you direct a scene.

It was during the summer of 1912 that Lillian had begun work with Griffith, at the old Biograph studio on Fourteenth Street. Now, almost exactly seven years later, she arrived at what may be called the crest of her film career. Not suddenly: she had been climbing steadily, working like a road-builder, almost from the first day. Now she had reached the top, that was all.

In an article for the *Ladies' Home Journal* (Sept., 1925) she said:

When anyone asks me to pick out from the many I have been in, the picture I like best, I answer without much hesitation, and without much thought, "Broken Blossoms." I say this not because the picture was an artistic picture, which it was. I say this not because it was a compelling or tragic story with no clearing-away, no laying of tracks, no getting ready for the tragedy—it was exactly all this; but because the picture was quickly and smoothly accomplished. It took only eighteen days to film.

She does not say that it was her most notable characterization, and in the broader sense, it may not rank with some of her later work: with Mimi, for instance, in "La Bohême"; with Hester Prynne, in "The Scarlet Letter." Nevertheless, it is the film rôle for which she will be longest remembered, the part that for artistic conception and



delineation and sheer beauty has not been surpassed, either by herself, or by any other. To this day, the magazines reproduce flashes from the now immortal closet scene of "Broken Blossoms," as the "highest example of screen realism."

"Broken Blossoms," a poetic tragedy of the Chinese slums of London, was a film adaptation of "The Chink and the Child," from Thomas Burke's collection entitled "Limehouse Nights." Griffith and Lillian recognized its possibilities, and what she could make of the part of the "Child." She at first thought the part too young for her, but agreed to try it.

The story is that of a brutal father, a pugilist, who beats and browbeats his twelve-year-old daughter until she has become a terrified, trembling little creature, a stunted human semblance, with a pathetically lovely face. A young Chinese, drift of the quarter, out of pity and adoration for her loveliness, one day gives her shelter, when, after a beating, she staggers into his poor shop. The ending involves the tragic death of all of them, the final scene being one of exquisite art. This is Griffith's version, but the character of Lucy Burrows is the same in both. This bit is from Burke's story:

. . . always in her step and in her look was expectation of dread things; . . . yet for all the starved face and transfixed air, there was a lurking beauty about her, a something that called you in the soft curve of her cheek, that cried for kisses and was fed with blows, and in the splendid mournfulness that grew in eyes and lips.

In the world of drama, there are rôles which the competent artist "creates"—well, or less well—and makes his

own; there are rôles—oh, rarely enough—which are his from the beginning, created *for* him: "Disraeli," for George Arliss—"The Music Master," for David Warfield. I have told my story very badly if the reader does not recognize that for Lillian Gish, the character of Lucy Burrows offered such a part: a part such as would not come to her during more than another ten years, and then, not for the screen.

To a young man named Richard Barthelmess, lately a graduate of Columbia College, Griffith gave the part of the "Chinaman," because he was rather small, very good-looking, with a face that could make up "Chinese." To Donald Crisp, an Englishman (he had been General Grant in "The Birth of a Nation"), he gave the part of Battling Burrows. Crisp was a realistic person, and had a face that in full war-paint was a thing to put fear into the stoutest heart.

Lillian was just over the influenza—not equal to the strenuous Griffith rehearsing. Carol Dempster, who had been a dancer in "Intolerance," rehearsed the part under his direction. Lillian rehearsed with Barthelmess, earning his gratitude.

"It was my first important picture," Barthelmess said recently, "and I was anxious to do it well. Lillian had had six or seven years' experience, and she was the soul of patience." Reflectively, he added: "Lillian, Dorothy, and Mary Pickford are the three finest technicians of the screen. I learned more from Lillian than from any other person, except Griffith."

The labor of production began. Lillian had been promised that she could work short hours, with nine hours each

night for sleep. But of course, Griffith could not stick to that. He could not keep away from the studio; nor could the others.

It was during this strenuous period that Lillian evolved what Griffith calls "the one original bit of business that has been introduced into the art of screen acting." In his ghastly preparation for beating Lucy, Battling Burrows pauses, and commands her to smile. Griffith and Lillian had discussed how this could be done most effectively. Then, in the midst of the scene, Lillian had an inspiration: Lifting her hand, she spread her fingers and pushed up the corners of her mouth. The effect was tremendous. "Do that again!" shouted Griffith, and they repeated the scene until they got that heart-wringing bit of technique to suit them. Griffith couldn't get over it.

Another classic bit is where the cringing Lucy, to arrest her father's hand, looks up in an agony of pleading terror: "Daddy, your shoes are dusty!" And flings herself forward to clean them.

The closet scene was the climax—the terrible moment where Lucy's father is breaking in, to kill her. Nobody could rehearse that for her. For three days and nights, she rehearsed it almost without sleep. Small wonder, then, that the hysterical terror of the child's face was scarcely acting at all, but reality. It is said that when the scene was "shot," there was an assemblage of silent, listening people outside the studio, awe-struck by Lillian's screams. Griffith, throughout the scene, sat staring, saying not a word. Her face, during the final assault and struggle, became a veritable whirling medley of terror, its flashing glimpses of agony beyond anything ever shown before or since on the screen. When it was ended, Griffith was as white as paper.



LILLIAN GISH AND RICHARD BARTHELMESS IN  
"BROKEN BLOSSOMS"



"Why didn't you tell me you were going to do that?" he asked, shakily.

"What impressed us all," writes Harry Carr (he had become Griffith's assistant), "was that all her reactions were those of a child. Her wild terror in the closet scene—the finest example of emotional hysteria in the history of the screen—was the terror of a child." Carr further remembers that she had been to several hospitals, to study hysteria, and to inquire how one would be likely to die, from beating.

Griffith was not quite sure what to do with "Broken Blossoms." He believed it a great artistic success, but it was unusual, tragic: It might win great and instant approval; it might be an utter failure. Harry Carr and Arthur Ryal, the latter a well-known press agent, urged him to take it to New York. Griffith agreed, and took everybody with him. Morris Gest, who saw it at a private showing, "went quite mad" over it: "Greatest picture the world has ever seen—charge what you please for it. You can pack the house at any cost." They agreed that two and three dollars would be the proper figure.

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“I WORK SUCH LONG HOURS”

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“BROKEN BLOSSOMS” was first shown as the initial offering of Griffith’s “repertory season” at the George M. Cohan Theatre, New York, May 13, 1919, before as distinguished an audience as had ever assembled in a Broadway theatre. There was not a hitch anywhere. The film was mechanically perfect; it was accompanied by special haunting music. The Chinese scenes showed an effect of pale blue lighting. Griffith, Lillian and Barthelmess were present. When the picture ended, its success assured, Morris Gest darted back stage, kicked over chairs, waved his arms, wept and laughed hysterically. The Sun, next evening, called it the “most artistic photoplay yet produced.” The Tribune said: “*It is the most beautiful motion picture we have ever seen, or ever expect to see. When it was over, we wanted to rush up to everyone we met and cry: ‘Oh, don’t miss it, don’t miss it!’*” There was a great deal more in the same strain, echoed by every critic. The elder Schildkraut said of it: “I have seen every actress of Europe and America during the last half century. Lillian Gish’s scene in the closet, where she is hiding in terror from her brutal father, is the finest work I have ever witnessed.”

And Lillian: if she had been no more than widely popular before, she was indubitably famous now. All day long, reporters and photographers waited outside her rooms at the Commodore. Invitations piled on her table. What a commotion!



"Life," she wrote Nell, "is just one long photograph and interview." Was she all they said? "Queen of the Silent Drama"? "Duse and Bernhardt of the Screen"? How could anyone be both? And why must she be anybody but herself? Still, it was rather fun to have them say those things; gratifying, too. Was she the little girl who such a brief while ago had lost her little telescope bag, running for a train, and slept on the station benches—tired, so tired?

She was tired, now. And there seemed no resting place. Almost immediately back in Los Angeles, she was writing Nell:

"I work such long hours. Sometimes I don't even see Mother for days. Can you imagine us living in the same house and hardly seeing one another?"

"I must go to the studio, now, to have what I hope will be my last interview for years. I certainly was not made to be famous, it is beginning to get on my nerves."

Somewhat later, she wrote:

Nell, we don't belong to that set where they think they buy happiness with dollars. I think that is why I didn't like New York, this time—though of course I shouldn't say that, as they were wonderful to me, both the press and the people. . . .

The studio gave a party for Mr. Griffith, Saturday night; all the stage-hands, electricians and working men, their wives and families, and of course the actors, and such. It reminded me of Massillon—was just such a party as we would have there—bright studio, all decorated with lanterns, and music playing, dancing, sandwiches, *baked beans*, ice-cream. . . . Madam (the colored lady who cleans the place) sang and danced. Dick, Dorothy and Bobby acted the fool—it was just a foolish party.

Her taste was for her friends, her work—the simple, daily round. Did she sometimes stop to look back over the

way she had come, and along a royal road that stretched before? I think not often. She was not a dreamer in that sense. When fan letters praised her to the skies, when the newspapers labeled her "The World's Darling," she was pleased, no doubt, but kept her balance; and sometimes, about three in the morning, she found it no trouble to remember that "the world's darling" was just a frail, little figure, huddled in the dark, trying to get to sleep.

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## XVI

### DIRECTOR LILLIAN

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GRIFFITH now took an important step. He removed himself and his players from California to New York, really to Mamaroneck, on Long Island Sound, where he had leased the old Flagler mansion and grounds, and contracted for a studio, soon to be completed. The mansion itself would serve for the executive offices, possibly for occasional scenes of grandeur. Lillian and her mother made the transcontinental journey with Harry Carr, now Griffith's right-hand man. Their train passed through Massillon, but at lightning speed. Carr remembers that all the way across the country, Lillian looked forward to this splendid moment, and though very late, refused to go to bed until it had passed.

She was greatly excited, and kept trying to point out things to me, though you couldn't see anything but the ticket office. I was impressed by how much of the child she had.

Lillian, with her mother and Dorothy, established themselves at the Hotel Commodore, to be handy to the Grand Central Station, and thus within thirty minutes of Mamaroneck. It was costly, and sometimes they planned to have a farm near the studio: "five acres, with pigs, cows, chickens, horses." At least, it was something to dream about, for Spring.

Griffith, having got his new studio about ready, conceived the notion of making two pictures in Florida, neither of them with a part for Lillian—a great disap-

pointment, for Nell still lived on the Blue Dog houseboat, at Miami.

However, there were compensations: Griffith wanted a picture made in his absence, and agreed to let Lillian direct it. To direct had been her ambition.

"I have changed my career," she wrote Nell, "—am a director; yes, am directing Dorothy's next picture; will start Friday—have the story all rehearsed, and will start taking, then."

They had done the story themselves, she and Dorothy. It had been partly inspired by a piece of "business" that Dorothy had found in a comic magazine: A husband had complained to his wife that she wore such dowdy clothes, no one would notice her on the street. When they went out again, the wife walked a few steps ahead and made faces at every man she met, with the result that all looked at her, much interested.

"We decided to make a picture around that situation"—Lillian telling the story—"and call it 'She Made Him Behave.' We were always looking for picture possibilities—particularly for leading men. James Rennie was at the moment in New York, disengaged, and was very glad to get the part—his first picture. When I first proposed directing a picture for Dorothy, Griffith said: 'Why do you want to break up your happy home?' meaning that Dorothy and I would fall out over it. We took the chance, and he went away and left us."

"He went away and left us!" She was barely twenty-three. However well-versed she was in the technique of picture-making, she had never directed an entire picture. She was taking over a new and untried studio; she was assuming the responsibility of spending what was at least

a modest fortune. Moreover, Griffith had never seen the script of the picture, for with Harry Carr to help, they made many incidents and scenes as they went along. The fact that Griffith was content to go away and leave the venture in her hands, implies two things: First, that his confidence in Lillian was large; second, that the motion-picture business is conducted on less rigid lines than other important enterprises. Both conclusions are warranted: Griffith did know Lillian, and the motion-picture industry is conducted like no other business on earth.

To begin with, it is not really a business at all—not merchandising. You are not buying something which you are to sell again. You are creating something—painting a canvas, doing it with human beings. Your accessories are mechanical, but even here, the personal element is a chief factor—the enthusiasm and good-will of the photographers, the electricians, the stage-hands. Griffith believed that Lillian could shape these to her taste. On the set, they were her friends. She called them by their intimate studio names: “Slim,” “Whitey,” “Joe,” and so on, and never left a set that she did not go to each one, and in her grave, dignified little way, thank him for the help he had been to her.

But let Lillian continue:

“I believed that no director had brought out Dorothy’s sweetness, especially her comic sense. I believed I could do it. Of course, I had been in pictures a number of years, and knew something about directing, but nothing at all of practical mechanics. I knew nothing of the measurements for a set, and was afraid the company would lose respect for me if they found it out. I went home and paced the floor of my room, measuring the number of

feet, to try to get some idea of what I wanted to talk about when I got back to the studio. As a result, I ordered a room that was too big for the height of it. The camera couldn't get far enough away, without shooting over the back wall. The camera-man, who had come from the war with a case of shell-shock, would walk up and down and throw his hat on the floor, and declare he couldn't stand it. But he was really very kind, and we learned something every day.

"But then the worst developed. Mr. Griffith had bought an engine to transform alternating to direct current, and when we were ready to shoot the picture, we didn't have enough 'juice' for the lights. We had to put a wire all the way from Mamaroneck, on poles, a costly job. Still it wouldn't do. We were promised the power, but we didn't get it. Sunday was my big day. Our picture had a wedding party, and I could get extras from Mamaroneck, thirty or forty of them, at two dollars a day; then, when we were ready, our lights failed us. It would be six o'clock in the evening before we could do anything. Perhaps not even then."

Desperate as was the situation, she appears never to have lost her nerve. In a letter from Harry Carr, always present, we gather that her mechanical assistants were most concerned.

The kindness she had shown to the rough-necks came ripe. They almost worked themselves to the bone for her. When anything went wrong, they looked ready to faint in a body. Lillian would sit hour after hour, alongside the camera, waiting for the lights to come on. One day she sat there uncomplainingly, from nine o'clock in the morning until eleven at night, without a flicker of light.



Uncomplainingly, but what must have been going on inside. There was a small studio in New Rochelle, the Fischer studio. It was a poor thing, but at least there were lights. The Mamaroneck electric people promised that if she would work there a few days, everything would be all right when she got back. So they carted themselves and their sets to New Rochelle, and began again.

"It was certainly a poor place," Lillian remembered; "Damp, the cellar full of water, no heat, and being late November and into December, it was very cold. Often, the actors had to hold their breath so it wouldn't photograph. The next Sunday we all moved back to Mamaroneck. The lights, they told us, were all right, but that was a mistake. Back we went to the Fischer studio. In all, we moved back and forth three times. I very nearly lost my mind.

"Of course, I was responsible, and spending money—oh, by the thousands. Mr. Epping, our business manager, every night brought me the items of what we had spent that day. I am not much at figures, but I could read the total, which was not cheerful. But everybody stood by me, the 'boys,' as we then called the electricians and property men, especially. The actors, too—everybody.

"The last day's work had to be done on Fifth Avenue, New York. It happened to come on the day before Christmas, and I didn't want to postpone it. We engaged a bus, from which Dorothy had to look down and see her 'husband' ride by in a cab with another woman. To work on the street without a permit laid us open to arrest and fine, with a good chance of spending Christmas in jail. To get a permit would take time, which we could not afford. 'Will you take a chance?' I asked those who were going



to do the scene. They agreed that they would, but things had a dubious look.

"Nevertheless, we got our bus and our taxicab, and started. I was on the bus with the camera-man—George Hill, now a famous director—Dorothy at the other end, the taxi just below. We had not gone a block when an enormous policeman started over, to see what it was all about. Then he took a good look at me and stopped, placed his fingers at the corners of his mouth and 'put up' a smile.

"You remember the scene in 'Broken Blossoms,' where the brutal father commands his terrified daughter to smile. I knew right away the big policeman had seen it. He really smiled, then, and so did I. 'Oh, it's you, is it?' he said. 'Yes, and this is my sister, Dorothy, and we're trying to finish a picture before Christmas.' 'Go right on,' he said. Farther up the Avenue, another policeman called out: 'What do you think you're doing up there?' I put up the smile myself, that time, hoping he had seen the picture. Evidently he had, for he laughed and waved us along. I thought it safer not to break any new ground, so we turned and made the circuit. We made it several times, and were not troubled again, but helped.

"That night we knew we were done, and everybody was so happy, and so sorry, weeping on one another's shoulders. By the time Mr. Griffith came home, our picture was nearly all cut, and ready. When he saw and approved of it, I was very happy, but it had nearly killed me."

Lillian decided that directing was not for women. "Remodeling a Husband," as the picture was finally called, turned out a financial success. She had spent fifty-eight

thousand dollars, and twenty-eight days, making it, but it netted a profit of a hundred and sixty thousand dollars, and doubled Dorothy's picture value. She was proud of all that, but did not care to try it again. A little while ago David Wark Griffith said:

"Lillian directed Dorothy in the best picture Dorothy ever made. I knew she could do it, for whenever we were making a picture I realized that she knew as much about it as I did—gave me valuable ideas about lights, angles, color, and a hundred things. She had brains, and used them, and she did not lose her head. You see what confidence I had in her to go off to Florida and leave her to direct a picture in a new studio, with all the problems of lights and sets, and a thousand other things a director has to contend with. I know how her lights failed on her, and all the complications that came up, and how she handled them, and how, out of it, she got that fine picture. One of the best. She didn't tell me, but Carr did."

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## XVII

### “WAY DOWN EAST”

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GRIFFITH now began work on his greatest melodrama. “Way Down East” had been successful as a book and a play, and was precisely the sort of thing he could do best. From William A. Brady, for a large sum, he secured the picture rights, and plunged into production. There were to be two great outdoor scenes: a blizzard, in which the heroine, who has been inveigled into a mock marriage—and is, therefore, under the New England code, fallen and outcast—is lost; and the frozen river, which, blinded and desperate, she reaches, to be carried to the falls on a cake of ice. There was very little that was artificial about such scenes, in that day: the blizzard had to be a real one, the ice, real ice—most of it, at any rate. Griffith began rehearsing some scenes at Claridge’s Hotel, in New York, continuing steadily for eight weeks; but all the time there was an order that in case of a blizzard, night or day, all hands were to report at the Mamaroneck studio. Lillian had taken Stanford White’s house on Orienta Point. Reading the play, she knew it was going to be an endurance test, and went into training for it. Cold baths, walks in the cold against the wind, exercises . . . she had faith in her body being equal to any emergency, if prepared for it. In a magazine article, a few years later, she wrote:

The memorable day of March 6th arrived, and with it a snow-storm and a ninety-mile-an-hour gale. As I was living at Mamaroneck, near the studio, I quickly reported, and was made up as Anna Moore, ready but not eager for the work to be

done. The scene to be taken was the one just after the irate Squire Bartlett turns Anna out of the house into the storm. Dazed and all but frozen, she wanders about through the snow, and finally to the river.

The Griffith studio was on a point or arm well out in Long Island Sound. The wind swept this narrow strip with great fury. The cameras had their backs to the gale. She had to face it.

She had been out only a short time when her face became caked with snow. Around her eyes this would melt—her lashes became small icicles. Griffith wanted this, and brought the cameras up close. Her lids were so heavy she could scarcely keep them open.

No need of spectacular "falls." The difficulty was to keep her feet. She was beaten back, flung about like a toy. Her face became drawn and twisted, almost out of human semblance. When she could stand no more, and was half-unconscious, they would pull her back to the studio on a little sled and give her hot tea. A brief rest and back to the gale. Griffith had invested a large sum in the picture, and she must make good. One could not count on another blizzard that season. Harry Carr writes:

That blizzard scene in "Way Down East" was real. It was taken in the most God-awful blizzard I ever saw. Three men lay flat to hold the legs of each camera. I went out four times, in order to be a hero, but sneaked back suffocated and half dead. Lillian stuck out there in front of the cameras. D. W. would ask her if she could stand it, and she would nod. The icicles hung from her lashes, and her face was blue. When the last shot was made, they had to *carry* her to the studio.

A week or two later, they were at White River Junction, Vermont, for the ice scenes. Griffith took a good

many of his company, and they put up at an old-fashioned hotel, a place of hospitality and good food.

White River Junction is at the confluence of the White and the Connecticut rivers. There is no fall there, but the current moves at the rate of six miles an hour, and the water is deep. The ice was from twelve to sixteen inches thick, and a good-sized piece of it made a fairly safe craft, but it was wet and slippery, and *very cold*. It was frozen solid when they arrived; had to be sawed and dynamited, to get pieces for the floating scene. Lillian conceived the idea of letting her hand and hair drag in the water. It was effective, but her hand became frosted; the chances of pneumonia increased. To the writer, recently, Richard Barthelmess, who had the star part opposite Lillian, said:

“Not once, but twenty times a day, for two weeks, Lillian floated down on a cake of ice, and I made my way to her, stepping from one cake to another, to rescue her. I had on a heavy fur coat, and if I had slipped, or if one of the cakes had cracked and let me through, my chances would not have been good. As for Lillian, why she did not get pneumonia, I still can’t understand. She has a wonderful constitution. Before we started, Griffith had us insured against accident, and sickness. Lillian, frail as she looked, was the only one of the company who passed one hundred percent perfect—condition and health.

“No accidents happened: The story that I missed a signal and did not reach Lillian in time, and that she came near going over the falls, would indicate that she made the float on the ice-cake but once. As I say, she made it numberless times, and there were *no falls*. Lillian was never nervous, and never afraid. I don’t think either of us thought of anything serious happening, though when I



ANNA MOORE





was carrying her, stepping from one ice-cake to another, we might easily have slipped in. I would not make that picture again for any money that a producer would be willing to pay for it."

At the end of the ice scene, there is an instant when the cake, at the brink of a fall, seems to start over, just as Barthelmess, carrying Lillian, steps from it to another, and another, half slipping in before he reaches the bank.

The critical moment at the brink of the fall was made in summer-time, at Winchell Smith's farm, near Farmington, Connecticut. The ice-cakes here were painted blocks of wood, or boxes, and were attached to piano wire. There was a real fall of fifteen feet at this place, and once, a carpenter went over and was considerably damaged. In the picture, as shown, Niagara was blended into this fall, with startling effect.

Barthelmess remembers that Lillian kept mostly to herself. She took her work very seriously—too much so, in the opinion of her associates. But once there was a barn-dance at the hotel, in which she joined; and once she and Barthelmess drove over to Dartmouth College, not far distant, with Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Clifton, to a dinner given them by Barthelmess's fraternity. After dinner, they heard a great tramp, tramp, and someone said to Lillian: "It's the college boys, coming to kidnap you." They sometimes did such things, for a lark.

But they only wanted to pay their respects. They gathered outside the window, which Mr. Clifton opened, and both Lillian and Barthelmess spoke to them through it.

The summer scenes of "Way Down East" were made at Farmington and at the Mamaroneck studio. Griffith had selected a fine cast, among them Lowell Sherman, the

villain; Burr McIntosh, as Squire Bartlett; Kate Bruce, his wife; Mary Hay, their niece; and Vivia Ogden, the village gossip. The scene where Squire Bartlett drives Anna Moore from his home, was realistic in its harshness, and poor Burr McIntosh, a sweet soul who long before had played Taffy in "Trilby," and who loved Lillian dearly, could never get over having been obliged to turn her out into the storm. Often, in after years, he begged her to forgive him.

A few minor incidents, connected with the making of "Way Down East," may be recalled: Griffith had spent a great sum of money for the rights—\$275,000, it is said—and was spending a great many more thousands producing it. He was naturally on a good deal of a tension. All were working to the limit of their strength, but they could not hold the pitch indefinitely. When Barthelmess, who is short, had to stand on a two-inch piece of board, to cope on terms of equality with Lowell Sherman, Sherman, who was a trained actor of the stage, could, and did, make invisible side remarks which made Barthelmess laugh. Whereupon, Griffith raged at the waste of time and film, and everybody was sorry, the villain penitent. "Stop that laughing! Turn around and face the camera," were sharp admonitions perpetuated by a right-about-face in the picture to this day.

It was harsh in form, rather than by intention. They did not resent these scoldings. They believed in Griffith, knew something of his problems, wanted him to make good.

There was one scene during which Griffith had no word to offer—the scene in which Anna Moore (Lillian) baptizes her dying child. Harry Carr writes:

The only time I ever saw a stage-hand cry was in the baptism scene in "Way Down East." It was made in a boxed-off corner, with only D. W., Lillian, the camera-man, a stage-hand and myself there. Everybody cried. It never made the same impression on the screen, because it was necessary to interrupt the action with the sub-titles. You saw her dripping the water on the baby's head; then a sub-title flashed on, saying: "In the Name of the Father, etc.," and the spell was broken.

Carr, Lillian and Griffith would sit far into the night, watching rushes from the scenes made the day before. It was a drowsy occupation—so many of the same thing—and after a day in the open, it was not surprising that Carr should nod. Across a misty plain of sleep, Griffith's voice would come to him: "Which shot do you like best, Carr?"

It is noticeable in the baptism scene, that Lillian sits relaxed, her knees apart; that when she leaves the house, she walks with a dragging step, as one who had recently experienced the struggle and agonies of child-birth. It has been suggested that she had visited a maternity hospital for these details. When asked, she said:

"No, I did not do that. There was an old woman connected with the studio, who had borne a number of children. She told me all that I needed to know. I learned something, too, from pictures of the Madonna, by old masters. I noticed in all of them that the Madonna sat with her knees apart. I felt that there must be a good reason for painting her in that way."

She had studied out every detail of the scenes she was to play. Many actors, even among the best, work by another method. They absorb the feeling of the plot, fling themselves into a scene, depending upon an angel to kindle

the divine fire. This method never was Lillian's. To her, the bush never of itself became a burning bush. She lit the fire and tended it. She knew the effect she wanted to produce, and found no research too tedious, no rehearsal too long—no effort too great, to achieve her end.

"Way Down East" was shown in October. Griffith, with Lillian and Barthelmess, were present in person, in the larger cities. It was like a triumphal tour. To present the "world's darling" in scenes of actual danger, on the screen, and then have her appear in person, was to invite something in the nature of a riot. Reporters indulged in the most extravagant language. And there was a freshet of poetry, and of letters—love-letters, many of them, but letters, also, from persons distinctly worthwhile. David Belasco, whose "most beautiful blonde" verdict had long since gone into the discard, *démodé*, wrote:

*Dear Lillian Gish,*

It was a revelation to see the little girl who was with me only a few years ago, moving through the pictured version of "Way Down East" with such perfect acting. In this play, you reach the very highest point in action, charm and delightful expression. It made me happy, too, to see how you and your name appeal to the public.

Congratulations on a splendid piece of work, and good wishes for your continued success.

Faithfully,

DAVID BELASCO

John Barrymore went even further, when he wrote:

*My dear Mr. Griffith:*

I have for the second time seen your picture of "Way Down East." Any personal praise of yourself or your genius regarding



THE RIVER SCENE IN "WAY DOWN EAST"



the picture I would naturally consider redundant and a little like carrying coals to Newcastle. . . .

I have not the honor of knowing Miss Gish personally and I am afraid that any expression of feeling addressed to her she might consider impertinent. I merely wish to tell you that her performance seems to me to be the most superlatively exquisite and poignantly enchaining thing that I have ever seen in my life.

I remember seeing Duse in this country many years ago, when I imagine she must have been at the height of her powers—also Madame Bernhardt—and for sheer technical brilliancy and great emotional projection, done with an almost uncanny simplicity and sincerity of method, it is great fun and a great stimulant to see an American artist equal, if not surpass, the finest traditions of the theatre.

I wonder if you would be good enough to thank Miss Gish from all of us who are trying to do the best we know how in the theatre.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN BARRYMORE

Mrs. Gish, who was not a motion-picture enthusiast, made a single comment:

"Well, young lady," she said, "you've set quite a high mark for yourself. How are you going to live up to it?"

"Way Down East" was one of the most popular and profitable pictures ever made. Net returns from it ran into the millions. It has had several revivals, and at the present writing (Winter, 1931), is being shown at the Cameo Theatre, New York, "with sound." Its day, however, is over. Taste has changed—has become what an older generation might regard as unduly sophisticated, depraved. This, with mechanical advancement—the talking feature, for instance—tells the story. A picture of even ten years ago—five years ago—is without a public.



“Way Down East” is a melodrama, but one that at moments rises to considerable heights. Putting aside the spectacular features of the picture—the blizzard and the ice-drift, where melodrama is raised to the nth degree—the scene where the villain reveals to his victim that their marriage was a mockery, the scene where Anna Moore, about to be turned out into the storm, denounces her betrayer, and the baptismal scene, already mentioned, are drama, and, as Lillian Gish gave them, worthy.

And, after all, what is, and is not, melodrama—and cheap. Cheap—because it is human. That is why we have invented for ourselves a hereafter—a place away from it all—of rest by green fields and running brooks. Very well, let us agree that the play was cheap, especially the comedy, which was low comedy and about the record in that direction. But if Lillian’s acting was cheap, and poor, then there is very little to be said for any acting, which, God knows, may be true enough, after all!

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## XVIII

### SAD, UNPROFITABLE DAYS

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LILLIAN to Nell, June 30, 1920:

Do you know that I am leaving Mr. Griffith? "Way Down East" that we are on, will be my last. I go with the Frohman Amusement Company, between the 1st and 15th of August. I am to make five pictures a year, for two years. If I make successful pictures, I shall make a lot of money. If I don't, well, kismet—it's all a gamble, anyway.

It was more of a "gamble" than she knew. Strictly speaking, there was no such thing as the "Frohman Amusement Company." No Frohman—no *amusement* Frohman—had anything to do with it. That was just a part of the gamble. Griffith, apparently, thought it all right, and so did his brother, for it was the latter who made the connection. Had Lillian made inquiries on her own account, her eyes might have been opened sooner, and less expensively.

Griffith and Lillian parted on the friendliest terms. Griffith said to her:

"You know the business as well as I do. You should be making more money than you can make with me." He did not say: "Stay with me and share in the prosperity which you have brought, and will bring me. No one can be more successful than we two together." To a simple-minded literary person, this would seem to have been the wisest course. Lillian thinks he had perhaps grown tired of seeing her around.

She did not make five pictures for the Frohman company, or even one. She did begin one, "World's Shadows," by Madame de Grésac, who claims here a word of introduction:

Somewhat earlier, Lillian had met this gifted French lady, god-daughter of Victorien Sardou, wife of the singer, Victor Maurel, herself a dramatist who had written French, English and Italian plays for Réjane, Duse, Marie Tempest, and others of distinction. Familiar with the best literary and art circles of Paris, considerably older than Lillian, small, red-haired, quick of speech—French, in the best meaning of the term—she was a revelation to the younger woman, who in spite of her years on the stage and screen, was a good deal of a primitive as to world knowledge, and art in its less obvious forms. The two were mutually fascinated: Madame de Grésac, dazed and delighted by Lillian's gifts and innocence; Lillian, stirred and awakened, and sometimes shocked, by the French-woman's brilliant mentality, her knowledge of life, her freedom of expression. In a brief time, they were devoted friends, confidantes.

When the so-called Frohman company wanted a picture for Lillian, Madame de Grésac agreed to prepare one. She did so, but about the time rehearsal was under way, Lillian's first (and only) salary cheque from the company was returned from the bank, unpaid—"No funds." They explained to her that certain backers had disappointed them. It may be so. At all events, there was a hitch somewhere, in this particular gamble. Lillian carried on, as a number of players had come with her from the Griffith staff, and as they seemed to be getting their money, she could not leave them in the lurch. But, of course, the end

came. Their pay, also, stopped. The thing that had never really existed, ceased to function. It was all a fiasco—a tragedy . . . so many tragedies in the show business.

“World Shadows” was discarded. It made no difference between the two friends. If anything, they were closer than before. The day was coming, not so many years ahead, when they would combine in another play—a success.

Madame’s husband, Victor Maurel, besides being a singer, had a passion for painting, and persuaded Lillian to pose for him. Lillian, with a view of sometime going back to the stage, greatly desired voice culture. They agreed that in exchange for half an hour’s posing, he would devote half an hour to training her voice. She had then finished “Way Down East,” which Maurel seemed to love. He watched it, time and again; then he had her go into a separate room, a dark room, and convey the feeling of it—paint the picture, as it were, with her voice. This was priceless training. It gave her voice a quality and value it had not possessed before. “From Maurel,” she said afterwards, “I got my consonants.”

Except for the triumph of “Way Down East,” a triumph not easy to understand in this more crowded, more inattentive day, that year of 1920 was hardly a cheerful one. For one thing, Mrs. Gish was in poor health. Dorothy had taken her to Italy, which might have been well enough but for the circumstances of their return.

It was the tragedy of Bobby Harron that brought them back. On September first, alone in his hotel room, Bobby shot himself. For years, he had been as one of the family. From the days of the Biograph company, he had taken

part in pictures with both Lillian and Dorothy; he had shared the hardships and dangers of those days and nights of bomb and shrapnel, in London and France. He had been a brother to them—to Dorothy, for a time, at least, something more. Now, he was dead.

Exactly what happened will always be a mystery. Lillian, in Philadelphia, where they were opening "Way Down East," wrote Nell:

These have been terrible days—the worst I have ever known. You have heard about it by this time, I imagine—about Bob: He was in his room, unpacking an old trunk, when a pistol fell out and exploded, the ball going through his lung. That was Sept. 1st, at 10:30 in the morning. He was taken to Bellevue, where he seemed to improve—we all held such high hopes—until Sunday morning, at 7:55, he breathed his last. Mother and Dorothy were some place in Italy—could get no word to them until Wednesday. They are taking the first boat home, which leaves today.

Bobby had been a Catholic, and when his mother and sister arrived, not knowing that he was dead, it fell to Lillian, with a priest, to meet them and break the news. Later, she took them home and looked after them for several weeks.

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## XIX

### PICTURING THE REIGN OF TERROR

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LILLIAN was in a position to make a new start. She made it with Griffith, who was having troubles of his own getting a group of players together for a production suited to his Mamaroneck studio. He wanted to do "Faust," but Lillian prevailed upon him to do "The Two Orphans," which would give Dorothy a good part, as Louise, the blind sister. Griffith agreed, and rehearsing for the new picture was soon under way. Lillian's salary was now a thousand dollars a week. The bark of the wolf, which had become noticeable, died away.

"Orphans of the Storm," as it was finally called, began as a rather close picture version of Kate Klaxton's old play. Two sisters set out for Paris by stage-coach, to obtain cure for the blind Louise. One of them, beautiful Henriette, is kidnapped on arrival, by a dissolute roué, the other is picked up by the terrible Madame Frouchard and compelled to beg in the streets. In the picture, the rescue and reunion of the sisters is brought about through a handsome young aristocrat who, under revolutionary ban, is sentenced to death on the guillotine. Henriette (Lillian) herself is involved, and narrowly escapes—being on the scaffold with her head under the knife at the moment of rescue. The revolutionary feature was a Griffith addition to the original play.

Griffith spent great sums on the settings of this picture. He was never one to be sparing in such matters while his money held out, with the result that he was likely to be



brought up with a round turn, at the end. For the guillotine scene, he required a great number of extras, and he could not afford to assemble them more than once. One morning he called up all the weather bureaus, and even an old man who had the rheumatism, to find out if it was going to rain. All said that it would not, and he got out the big crowd for the guillotine episode, as big as he could afford. And it didn't rain, but it was cloudy. Never mind, he would make the picture anyway. He could not assemble that crowd again.

Interesting things happened during the making of the picture. Harry Carr recalls that a certain actor, fresh from Broadway, with the tricks not unfamiliar there, had the habit of easing back from the camera in his scenes with Lillian, so that she would have to turn her face to speak to him. She did not complain, but "Whitey," head electrician, came to Carr, pale with anger:

"You tell that kike," he said, "that the next time he does that, us boys will drop a dome light on his bean. Lots of accidents happen in studios, and one is about to happen now."

Carr passed along the information, with the result that the offender made no more mistakes—was almost afraid to leave his dressing-room. According to Carr, Frances Marion, the distinguished scenario writer, once said: "There is plenty of real chivalry in motion picture studios, but it's all to be found among the juice-gangs." Carr adds:

Griffith had a way of rehearsing plays until everybody wished himself dead—chairs for horses—tables for thrones, etc. He rehearsed with anybody who happened to be around. Kate Bruce was rehearsed weeks on end, for a part that she very much wanted, but which Griffith, with his dread of the irrev-



ocable, had never really assured her she could play. Lillian at last cornered him, just before the picture actually began. He reluctantly said that he supposed "Brucie" would get the part. "Then please let me tell her," pleaded Lillian. "All right," assented D. W., and Lillian ran to her like a little girl. Brucie was sitting in a chair on the set. Lillian almost picked up her frail little body. I don't know what they said, but they stood there, crying in each other's arms. They both realized that it would probably be Brucie's last big part.

When Lillian got a new part, she flung herself into it completely. She wanted to know what such a girl would eat; what she would do on her holidays; what colors she would like. Making "Orphans of the Storm," Lillian turned herself into French. She read French books, and did everything to avoid talking, even to us, who might drag her out of the picture.

"Orphans of the Storm" was finished in time to open in Boston about the end of the year 1921. Lillian and Dorothy accompanied Griffith to the first showing; also, to other first showings in the larger cities—as far South as New Orleans, as far West as Minneapolis and St. Paul. Everywhere they were fêted and entertained; in New Orleans the railway station was crowded when they arrived; the news correspondent says that a procession with a "real, honest-to-goodness brass band led the way to the City Hall, where the Mayor of New Orleans gave Lillian and Dorothy Gish a warm welcome and the freedom of the city."

Perhaps there were not brass bands everywhere, but always a crowd, always entertainment, always a reception on the stage after the picture, with demands for a speech, which Lillian had to make. In Washington, they were given a special luncheon by President and Mrs. Harding, with great boxes of flowers which, with Griffith standing

between them, Lillian and Dorothy were obliged to hold while they were being photographed. The papers spoke of the "democracy of these two celebrities, who were so cheerfully willing to meet in a 'closeup,' in the lobbies, after their appearance on the stage, proving the bigness of their characters." True enough, but there was another side to it: Lillian to Nell:

We have been going around the country on the "Orphans" tour. It is all so nerve-racking. I would rather do anything else, but if it helps Mr. Griffith, of course I could not refuse, and I suppose it is a good experience. You can't be a hermit all your life, though I do not enjoy crawling out of my shell. . . . I was never made for this life—if they would only let me go by unnoticed.

She could not hope for that. They had her back in Boston, to ornament the hundredth showing, and the celebration was greater than ever. Miss Crabtree, once the adorable "Lotta," was there. Lillian went into a stage box to see her. The little old lady, darling of a former generation, kissed her affectionately, and taking her hands, sat stroking them. Presently she said, softly: "Take care of your beauty, dearest—it goes so soon—so very, very soon."

In an interview, Lillian expressed a belief that colleges might give moving-picture courses, thereby improving the standards of both acting and morals in productions of the future. This was seized upon by the Harvard Dramatic Club, and she was urged to speak at the Harvard Union. She had spoken briefly at a number of churches, during her travels, and presently we find her addressing an audience of several thousand, at the Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church, in 178th Street, New York. The burden of

her purpose, as to the pictures, she conveyed in these words:

"The industry needs the development that the people of the church and the educators can give it. We players are doing our very best to get rid of all objectionable elements, but we want outside help.

"The time is coming when educational pictures will fill library shelves, exactly as books do now, and the universities should anticipate library educational advance. This is a great reason why cinema courses should be given in colleges."

She did not write her speeches. She carried in her head a few main points, and spoke extemporaneously. Her clear, trained voice, reached every part of the great edifice—a treat for those who heard her. One of them, a woman, wrote:

If I were a poet, I suppose I might make a lovely poem about you; or I might, were I a painter, try to put on my canvas something so glorious that it would speak to everyone of what an inspiration and delight you are; but I am nobody at all—nobody except your sincere admirer.

And it was another woman who wrote of "Orphans of the Storm":

I cannot get over your acting: I never feel the reality of a character so keenly as when you portray it. And there is no raving. Why, I have watched you play emotional scenes in which you scarcely moved a finger, and still, as someone said: "Your silence is as golden as the voice of Bernhardt."

Which brings us back to the picture itself.

It was a beautiful and successful production. Some of the sets were especially fine: The garden picture, for in-

stance, with its setting of palace and fountain and richly costumed guests, its magnificent outer gates.

The court scene, the sinister tribunal of the Revolution, was terribly realistic; the ghastly guillotine climax was quite as horrible as it was intended to be, with only the usual fault of such picture episodes, that the suspense was too prolonged—prolonged to a point where the horror evaporated.

The finest scene in the picture is where Dorothy, as the blind Louise, is singing in the street, while Lillian, in a room above, absorbed in the narration of Louise's mother, hears and gradually recognizes her sister's voice, and then is unable to reach her. The awakening recognition, gradual, tender, startled, in Lillian's face, compares with the best of her screen work.

The old stage-coach in which Lillian and Dorothy drove to Paris . . . whatever became of it? It was too good to go the way of old properties. "Orphans of the Storm" was worthy of Griffith and of Lillian. It seems fitting that their long association should finally end in this distinguished and happy way.

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## PART THREE

### I

#### ITALY

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LIFE, always a serious matter to Lillian, became more so. Mrs. Gish underwent a major operation—was in grave danger. Lillian, at work on the set in Mamaroneck, was likely at any moment to be summoned to the Presbyterian Hospital in New York. When the patient was able to be moved, they brought her by ambulance to a house they had taken in New Rochelle. Later to an apartment on Park Avenue—three moves within a year, seeking comfort for the sufferer.

Spring was saddened by the death of Victor Maurel, who had done so much for her voice. His funeral services were held in New York. Lillian attended with his widow, Madame de Grésac, and there met Madame Calvé, who had been his pupil. In the carriage on the way to the grave, Madame Calvé told the others how she had been in Boston, knowing nothing of his danger. Suddenly she had felt that something was wrong with him. The feeling was so strong that she had taken the train for New York. He was dead when she arrived.

A few weeks after the funeral, Calvé asked Madame de Grésac and Lillian to come to her apartment, a beautiful place in the Hôtel des Artistes, on Central Park. She sang for them. Her voice was so enormous that it seemed as if it might burst the walls. She said that Victor Maurel's training had made it what it was. She danced for them—the peasant dances—until the people downstairs sent up word that their chandeliers were about to come down. She

was so eager to divert the little widow. Too eager for her own good: she danced so hard, that night, and so long, that next day she could not start on her tour.

Lillian was unsettled as to what she should do. Again, Griffith agreed with her that she should be making more money, and perhaps it did not seem to either of them that any picture they could do together would make enough for both. He was an extravagant producer, and her financial obligations had become very heavy. In March she wrote:

“My next picture, if all goes well, will be made by myself, so if it makes money I may get some of it.”

She had been negotiating with the Tiffany Company, considering an offer of \$3,500.00 a week, to make four or five pictures a year, when her representative, Frederick Newman, was approached by the president of a new producing company, a meeting which marked the beginning of an episode wholly different from anything she had known.

Her old fellow-player, “Dick” Barthelmess, was already with the new company, and had produced “Tol’able David,” directed by Henry King, a success of which all his friends were proud. Lillian had not been much impressed by the Tiffany offer, mainly for the reason that they seemed to be doing circus pictures, and she did not fancy the idea of being cast for something with a slack-wire, or a trapeze, in it. She agreed with Newman to meet the chief official of the new company, and a few days later, lunching at the Ritz, the three discussed picture possibilities and terms. The new producer was a convincing talker. Lillian was favorably impressed, especially as he agreed to take Dorothy, who would play with Barthel-



mess in two pictures, with Lillian in two pictures, after which she would be given a contract of her own.

Lillian's contract, which she signed that summer (1922), gave her \$1,250.00 a week, and an added 15% after a certain amount had been earned. She thought this a highly satisfactory arrangement, as it made her returns depend largely upon the quality and success of the pictures. Recently, she said:

"All that summer I was looking for material for my first picture. We had two women read all the heap of things submitted. Whenever they found something they thought Dick or I might use, we read it. I nearly read my eyes out. One of the women, Lily Hayward, one day brought me Marion Crawford's 'White Sister.' It struck me immediately as good picture material.

"Ever since my winter at the Ursuline School in St. Louis, I had thought of the nuns as earnest women, hard-working and kindly. My memory of them was an affectionate one—romantic. There had been a time when I fancied I might have a vocation for the veil. The cloister has appealed to so many who later became actresses. I have regretted, sometimes, that I did not follow that early inclination.

"There was another special reason why the book appealed to me as picture material: I saw a chance to get in a scene showing the ceremony of taking the veil—a scene not really in the book at all."

She met with plenty of opposition. Everybody, it seemed, objected to the story, on the ground that it was a religious picture, "the one thing motion pictures would be wise to let alone"—everybody but Griffith, in whose studio she made some tests. Griffith thought it a beautiful



story. Her producer also believed in it, because, as he said, he had faith in her judgment. Henry King, who had directed *Barthelmess*, was not enthusiastic, at first, but warmed to the prospect of a trip to Italy.

By October they were ready to go—all the players engaged except the leading man. James Abbe, a photographer, gave up a good business in New York to become their "still" man, and to assist in other ways. Abbe was valuable. One morning, quite excitedly, he called up Lillian, saying he believed he had found a man for the lead. His name, he said, was Ronald Colman, playing with Henry Miller and Ruth Chatterton, in "*La Tendresse*."

They arranged to have a test made in Abbe's studio, that same afternoon. Lillian went down; King directed the test. All privately agreed that Colman was what they wanted; next morning, when they saw the tests, they were sure of it. Colman declared himself willing to go, and everybody voted "Yes—if we can get him." Henry Miller, when he learned the situation, generously agreed to release him from his part, which, though not the lead, was important. This was not only to oblige them, but to give Colman the opportunity he wanted. It was on Thursday morning that they saw the tests. On Saturday of the same week they sailed—twenty-four of them—on a Fabre Line steamer, bound for Naples.

"It was raining when we left Brooklyn," Lillian remembers, "and very dismal and disheartening, especially as I was leaving Mother and Dorothy behind—Mother being still in the Catskills. Dorothy and Mary Pickford came with me to the ship—a great comfort."

It was hardly a lazy voyage. Colman knew nothing about playing before the camera. Director King rehearsed

him in his parts with Lillian, and with the whole company, as soon as they got their sea-legs. The Providence has a little after-deck, which the captain ordered enclosed in canvas for their use. It was a very busy place during several hours of every day. The Providence was a good ship, and the Southern route is nearly always delightful. It was never too cold to rehearse, and afterwards, one could sit drowsily in a deck chair and pretend to read, or lean over the side, looking at the bluest of blue water, or watching bits of skimming silver that were flying fish, and the big, black, graceful bodies that were porpoises. One never ought to cross by that friendless Northern route.

On the ship with them, by great good luck, was Monseigneur Bonzano, high prelate of the Church, then on his way to Rome to be made a Cardinal. Lillian quickly became acquainted with him. They put in much of their spare time discussing the picture she was to make—ways and means for its accomplishment. It was easy to realize that the churchman was won to the idea when he mentally associated the face before him with the part of the White Sister. And Lillian, regarding Bonzano, was infinitely impressed. His personality, his attainments, his human understanding, went far beyond anything she had ever known.

“I think he had the most beautiful face I have ever seen. He had traveled in many countries, and lived a long time in China. He spoke Chinese and any number of other languages and dialects. He had an understanding of all races. It was destiny that he should have been on that boat. Without him, we could hardly have made our picture. We were between the Church and the Fascisti. Through him,

later, the doors of all Catholic Institutions were opened to us. When we stopped at Palermo, he took us through the great church where the mosaics are. He had us shown the treasure, and the jeweled robes. It was early November in Palermo, and very lovely. We landed at Naples.”

Italy! All the way to Rome, Lillian looked out the window. She was tired, but no matter. It was evening, there was a mist on the field—the vines trailing from tree to tree, Italian fashion, were like wonderful great spider-webs. She would never forget that vision. It was eleven when they reached Rome.

Rooms had been engaged at two hotels, the Excelsior and the Majestic. Lillian and her companion, Mrs. Marie Kratsch, of Massillon, were at the former. Very tired, they went promptly to bed. Then it seemed that almost immediately they were awakened by an astonishing sound—the bells of Rome! Never in her life had she heard anything like that. Why, they were right in the room!

In Rome they found a small studio—sunlight, and four little Klieg lights, when they needed at least fifty, possibly a hundred. They ordered them from Germany, but did not sit down to wait for them. Lillian rehearsed the company while Director King looked for locations. Now and again she visited convents, forty or more, to decide what Order to use. She finally chose the Order of Lourdes.

“We also began building our sets.” [Lillian remembering.] “We used the Villa d’Esti, as the convent, and built all the interiors, the chapel, etc. We built the most beautiful interiors I had ever seen. Our library walls were of solid carved wood, so beautiful that we wanted to put walls around them, and live in them. I think no other

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moving picture sets were ever as beautiful as those we built in Rome and Florence. This had to be so, because they were to match up with a real hall or corridor. Construction was far cheaper than in America, but that was not all—oh, by no means! We got there a feeling that it is impossible to get here: the workmen had a love for what they were doing and expressed it in the carving, or whatever the work was.”

So many of the critics had likened her acting to that of Duse. Yet she had never seen Duse . . . hardly expected to, now. She was to have her chance, however. Soon after her arrival in Rome, Duse was given an engagement at the Constanta Theatre.

“I gave a party for the occasion—Mr. King and his wife, Mrs. Kratsch and myself. The play was ‘Ghosts.’ You may remember Gordon Craig once designed scenery for it, especially for her. Isadora Duncan tells of it in her ‘Life.’ It saddened me to find the house not more than half filled. I was told that this was not unusual in Italy, where the young, fresh actress is always the favorite over one who has seen her best days. She fascinated me. I could not get enough of her. And then, at the end, a single white wreath, the flowers beginning to droop, was handed over the footlights. It was like a funeral offering.

“Every night while she was there, I saw her, and through a mutual friend we exchanged affectionate messages. I was to have called on her; but then I heard that she was ill, and I said they must not let me come. A year later, during her last visit to America—when she died in Pittsburgh—I saw her, in New York. It was in ‘The Lady from the Sea,’ and they gave her an opening night at the Metropolitan Opera House. It was a great triumph. It

made up, I thought, for her neglect at home. I have never seen any theatre so packed as that was. Every seat, every standing-space . . . Morris Gest had floored over the orchestra pit and placed chairs there.

"I was very busy, and did not know that I could attend. When I found I could get away, I telephoned to Mr. Gest and asked him if he could possibly get me in, anywhere—in the wings—anywhere. He said that he would take care of me, and when I got there I found that he had placed a chair in front, on the floor he had built over the orchestra, so I got to see her at that close range.

"Long after, in Pittsburgh, where I was playing in 'Vanya,' a newspaper woman, Mrs. Parry, told me that if anyone ever died of humiliation, Duse did . . . her life had known so many heartbreaks. I have a very precious souvenir. When Duse died, the King of Italy sent a wreath of white roses, to be laid on her casket. John Regan, a ship-news reporter, one of my good friends, obtained a bud from it, put it into a small Italian box, of carved wood, with a little Botticelli reproduction, 'The Three Graces,' on the cover, and sent it to me. It is one of my priceless possessions. It always stays on a little table at the head of my bed."

Lillian's early weeks in Rome remain among her happiest memories. The little girl who once had been dragged through a sordid succession of one-night stands, with such interest as smoky towns and sodden fields could provide, was having her innings at last. They visited the Pincio, drove out the Appian way, and saw the Coliseum by moonlight. What a night it was! There was music all about—at one place, someone was playing a violin. Farther along, someone was singing.



And the churches—she tried to visit them all! There are said to be three hundred and sixty-five churches in Rome, and if one makes a wish on one's first visit it is almost sure to be granted. She made wishes all over Rome, and left candles burning for her mother's health.

It was not very long after their arrival that the grand ceremony, where Monseigneur Bonzano and others were made Cardinals, took place at the Vatican. All the players were asked to attend, and were much excited. They had to rise at five-thirty, to be there on time. The hour set for the ceremony was six-thirty—ladies to be in black, high-necked dresses, black veils over the head (not face), men in full evening dress, long coats, white ties.

The guards were costumed in the dress designed by Raphael, the ambassadors all in the most gorgeous array. Lillian thought them very handsome, chosen, no doubt, for their physical appearance. Two actors—Mr. Charles Lane, who played the part of Lillian's father, and Mr. Barney Sherry—Monseigneur in the picture—were so distinguished looking, so imposing, with their white hair and fine faces and stately figures, that they were mistaken for ambassadors and ushered into the room where the ceremony took place. The Pope came in a golden chair, carried by twenty-four men, accompanied by the Sistine Choir, the gorgeous ambassadors, and the scarlet and ermine clad cardinals.

On Christmas Eve, she went with Mrs. Kratsch to Midnight Mass. That was beautiful, too, and very strange. So many things in the church. Some of the people had brought their dogs, or cats, even a goat. Two young people were making love. Leaving the glory of the great altar for

the street, was to go to the other extreme. A little way along, was a stable. Looking in, they saw a mother leaning against a donkey, nursing her baby. It might have been the Manger at Bethlehem.

The lights came from Germany, but there was still trouble. All Rome could not supply enough "juice" to run them. Mamaroneck over again. Eventually an engine was brought from Civita Vecchia. They had expected to finish the "White Sister" in three months, at the longest. It would take double that time, or more.



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## II

### “THE WHITE SISTER”

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THE story of “The White Sister” is not an unusual one. A beautiful young girl, defrauded of her fortune, pledges her love to a young army officer, who almost immediately goes to Africa, whence presently comes the news that he has been massacred with a detachment of his men. Broken-hearted, but clinging to hope, the bereaved girl becomes a lay sister in a Catholic institution—a hospital—and after long years of waiting, takes the vows of the Order, becomes a nun. Of course, at once, the soldier, who all these years has been a caged prisoner, returns, sees her, demands that the Church give her up, even kidnaps her, temporarily in the belief that she will require her freedom at the hands of the Pope. In the book, he gets her as a reward for unexampled bravery in a catastrophe. In the picture, he is even braver, but has to rely on Heaven for his reward, for Angela (Lillian) remains true to her vows, and in any case, Giovanni (Colman) does not survive the catastrophe.

The tragic ending was thought better for the picture, with something more spectacular than a mere explosion of a powder magazine for the catastrophe. Henry King was for a flood; Robert Haas, art director, for a volcanic eruption. In the end, they had both, also an earthquake—to start the flood. Of course, that meant changing the scene of the story. It was too costly, even for a motion picture magnate, to bring Vesuvius to Rome, so they moved Rome to Vesuvius—that is to say, they moved

Angela's convent to a town on the slopes above Naples, where the volcano would be handy. A laboratory, an important feature in the picture, they likewise built on the Vesuvian slope, but as Vesuvius could not be counted on to erupt on schedule, Haas built a miniature and dependable volcano in the studio.

"We worked very late," Lillian remembers, "and I can still see Bob Haas, those nights when we were all tired out, sticking his head from the crater of his pet property, with some inane remark that would set us all off in a gale of wild laughter.

"During our stay in Naples, I was given a room in the Excelsior Hotel, with a window that looked out directly on Vesuvius. At that time of year, the sun seemed to rise from the crater. It was a room that Duse had once occupied.

"In Rome, our studio was on the outskirts. From my dressing-room, I could see the dome of St. Peter's in the distance. We ate our luncheon in a little detached house, where the caretaker and his wife lived. The room was small, and all gathered round one table . . . simple food, spaghetti, sardines, cheese, and always red wine with water. And then the Italian bread! A sandwich of Italian bread and sardines, with red Italian wine—nothing is better than that! We named our projection-room 'The Catacombs,' for it was a kind of cave, and had the same atmosphere. Our studio being small, we occupied every corner of it."

Soon after the first of the year, they began "shooting" the picture. They had trouble at the start, getting extras, and workmen. Italians will not drop what they are doing and come to a stranger, even at double price. Finally,

when they decided that the picture-makers were reliable—and sane—they came in droves, and remained.

One day, Count and Countess Carlo Frasso (she had been American) came out to see the work. It was where Giovanni is going to war: the lovers embrace, and Angela weeps. The Count and Countess expressed surprise that "Angela" shed real tears. They did not know that tears could be turned on in that way. She was invited to their palazzo, to dine. A duke of the royal house was there, a large, handsome man, to whom the ladies made beautiful curtsies, after the custom of the Court. The room was enormous, with many ambassadors in their splendid uniforms. Lillian was much impressed by the height and grace and physical beauty of the upper class Italians.

Through Cardinal Bonzano they secured the assistance of the Church. Priests even came to the studio, to supervise the scenes, to see that no mistakes were made in the appointments and ceremonies. The company was given an audience with the Pope, and Lillian saw him several times afterwards. All the things she wore in her part he blessed.

Lillian loved Rome, and tried to enter into the spirit of the people and the Church, for the sake of her part. She studied Italian, and little by little, learned to speak and understand, pretty well. She wanted to think and feel as Angela would think and feel . . . to know Rome as Angela would have known it—its ancient monuments, its social aspects, its religious ceremonies, its feast days. Rome at Easter Time . . . the Sancta Scala, where one ascends all the steps on one's knees; Saint Paul's on Good Friday, for the Gregorian Chants; Saint Peter's on Easter Morning, where all the world goes by . . . the spirit of the

Church, of Rome, of Italy, were in these—and in the market places, the streets, the beggars . . . everywhere.

Henry King got up his flood at Tivoli, near Rome. There is a fall there, and in some way the engineers held the water until the moment when the volcano and the earthquake were supposed to cause a dam to break and flood the little city that was on the slopes of Vesuvius.

The "eruption," we made at the little town of Rocca di Papa, above Rome. They took up great airplane propellers to make the wind. Before an eruption, there comes a great hush—then wind with lightning, then the earthquake. The people of the village were engaged to be the panic-stricken crowd. They had no need of stage direction. When the big propellers started, they were frightened enough without being told. The wind those propellers made was terrific. The place became a bedlam of swirling dust and frantic people. Dust flew that had not been moved for five hundred years. A real eruption could hardly have frightened them worse.

"That day, and the next, were killing days for me." Lillian remembered. "From eight-thirty in the morning, in the sun and dust, making scenes and bits that were a part of the great eruption; then back to the studio, and after a bath, make-up and costume, the great scene where Angela takes the veil. I should have been in perfect condition for that scene, and I was in about the worst possible. We kept at it steadily through the night, until nine-thirty next morning, twenty-five hours at a stretch, without sleep. Then I was allowed two hours and a half of rest. I slept some of it, but right away jumped into work again, and kept at it until eleven that night, when I was put into

an automobile with Mrs. Kratsch and motored to Florence, stopping for a brief rest at Orvieto.

"At Florence I saw the studio, costumes, sets, etc., that had been partly arranged for, to be used in 'Romola,' which we were going to do the following winter. Nobody works harder than motion picture players—in the heat and glare of blazing lights, in all kinds of weather—twelve, fifteen, twenty-four hours on end.

"From Florence to Paris, and to Cherbourg. On the ship, I got into a cabinet bath, and then went to bed. I did not know when we sailed, and I slept the clock twice around without a break. I started with a terrible cold, but the bath and the rest cured it.

"We had begun 'The White Sister' in November, and it was now June. In New York King and I worked at the cutting, all through the summer, until the last of August, getting twelve reels ready for the big theatres. At the same time we were putting 'Romola' into shape to picture. King presently went back to Italy to begin work on it, while I remained to cut 'The White Sister' down to nine reels, for the road, a difficult and anxious job."

"The White Sister" made its first appearance, "World's Premiere," at the 44th Street Theatre, New York City, Wednesday evening, September 5, 1923. There was a special souvenir program, tied with a blue cord, with Lillian's picture on the outside and a message from Doug and Mary within.

The crowd poured in. Behind the curtain, on a soap box, Lillian and Dorothy anxiously waited the public verdict. Lillian wore a new ivory velvet dress, ordered for the occasion. She had been going to wear one of her old

gowns, but Dorothy and the others had shamed her into buying a new one. She was certain to be called on, they said, and what a disgrace to appear at less than one's best. So the new gown had been made on short notice, and now draped itself around the soap box, while the reels that told the story of Angela and Giovanni unwound, to lovely music, and their figures flickered silently across the screen. Two sisters, that twenty years before, night after night, had waited much in the same way to "go on" in their childish parts. Did they remember that? Probably not—they were too anxious, too expectant, and when presently the applause came roaring through to them, they hugged each other, for it seemed to mean success.

It was a long waiting, nearly two hours, but it was over at last, and there came a great final uproar, Lillian was summoned, and in the glory of her ivory velvet, appeared before the curtain, and when the deafening burst of greeting had subsided, made a brief speech, and the great first night was at an end.

She had arranged a small supper at her apartment in the Hotel Vanderbilt, just the family. A telegram from Mrs. Gish, by this time in California, had come:

"Mother wishes you all success possible in your new picture. I know that you will be sweet and dear in it."

Her health was much better. She would go with them to Florence, for "Romola." Probably the two years or more of Lillian's Italian picture episode would not show another night as happy as that one.

"The White Sister" proved an undeniable success. Lillian's ethereal presentation of her part would insure that, and even when some random critic raised his voice in timid protest as to the artistic structure of the edifice,



his accents were drowned in the chorus of applause: The picture was unique. It had been made with the sanction and aid of the Church. The Vatican had fixed upon it its seal of approval. That settled that.

Now that seven years and a day have gone by, one seeing "The White Sister" again, as the writer of these chapters has seen it, rather recently—may, perhaps, speak of it with a steadier pulse. There could be no question as to Lillian's part in it. At more than one moment in the sequence she rose to great heights, and at no time was her performance less than distinguished. At one instant—it is where she is prostrated by the shock of Giovanni's reported death—the spasmodic twitching of her cheek—the result of long rehearsal—was hardly less than miraculous.

As a whole, however, she had done better work than in "The White Sister." In "Broken Blossoms," for instance—and she has done immeasurably better work since: in "La Bohême," in "The Scarlet Letter," in "Wind," in her part of Helena in Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," her stage play of 1930. Also, a good deal of her personality was lost in "The White Sister"—had become mere costume. Of all people, Lillian is the last to be standardized by uniform.

The picture itself was hardly a structural triumph. Briefly, its beginning and its middle seem not very logical, its ending hopelessly disproportionate. A volcanic eruption, an earthquake and a flood, for no better reason, when all is said, than to kill a poor soldier who had already spent five years shut up in a rabbit-hutch. Nothing he had done warranted his being drowned like a rat in a flooded ditch. If all of us who have been tempted to kidnap the woman we loved, in, or out of the Church, deserve drowning,



then it's high time to invite a return engagement of Noah's flood. If Ronnie Colman—Giovanni, I mean—had, perforce, to renounce his heart's desire, surely a simpler and less unbeautiful way than that might have been invented. A volcano, an earthquake and a flood—such a rumpus, only to bring death and redemption to one unhappy soldier! To have let him ride or sail out of the picture, going back to Africa, would have been infinitely less expensive, and even more heartbreaking, assuming that this was what the picture intended to be. At any rate, it caused the shedding of many tears. In Germany, it was immensely popular—in no other land are tears such a luxury.

It had been Lillian's wish to dedicate the picture to the Sisters of the Ursuline Academy in St. Louis, her old school, and she hoped to go back there and run it for them, but was never able to carry out this purpose.

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From the Director of Entertainments at Sing Sing Prison, Lillian received an invitation to appear before the prisoners, on the occasion of a showing—not of the new picture, but of "Broken Blossoms," which, it appears, had strangely enough become their favorite picture—for five years had been voted as such.

She hesitated. She thought it could only be a sad occasion, but she could not refuse. A day was arranged, and she made the beautiful drive through the free air and sunshine, to a community where the outer scene was limited to prison walls. She was met by the Warden and one other official. Then they left her, and the prisoners were assembled. She found herself alone with them. At first, it was strange, uncanny, then delightful. All were so cour-



"THE WHITE SISTER"

*Charles Albin*



teous and interested. After the picture was shown, she talked to them. She told them how the play was made. They regarded her with deep attention, hanging eagerly on every word. When she had finished, they gathered about her. One among them had been a friend of Thomas Burke, who wrote the story. By the time she was ready to go, she had forgotten they were prisoners, and at the door asked her escort:

"Aren't you coming with me?"

He smiled a faint, sad smile.

"Only so far, Miss Gish, and no farther."

Speaking of it, she said:

"I believe criminals are only mentally and morally ill. The State employs judges to send them to prison. Why not employ doctors, to diagnose and treat them?"

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### III

#### "ROMOLA"

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REPORTS from "The White Sister" showed that it was going to make record runs—that returns from it would be very large. Catholics and Protestants alike approved it. Father Duffy, of the Fighting Irish 69th Regiment, of New York, wrote:

I wish to nominate "The White Sister" for a high place on the White List of dramatic performances. . . . It is religion struggling with human passions, as in real life, and gaining its victory after storm and stress.

Chicago society deserted the opera on the opening night of "The White Sister," and similar reports came from elsewhere. Lillian's personal tribute—her "fan" mail—assumed mountainous proportions: offers of engagements, protection, marriage, requests for loans . . . what not?

Meantime, one must get on with the next picture. King was already in Italy, making a pirate ship scene. Lillian finished cutting down "The White Sister," for road use, an arduous, delicate work, and with Mrs. Kratsch, sailed in November. Dorothy was to be in "Romola," and with her mother had sailed a little earlier.

To Genoa, then Florence, where they put up at the Grand Hotel on the Arno, with an outlook on the Ponte Vecchio, all that the heart could desire, if the weather had only been a little more encouraging.

It began to rain, and it continued to rain—"about nine-

teen days out of twenty," Dorothy said. Dorothy thought the rain not very wet rain—not at all like English and American rain—not so solid—light, like ether. But one evening, the rain stopped, and when they woke in the night, there was a strange silence. In the morning, there was another sound—also strange—strangely familiar. Dorothy looked over at Lillian.

"If we were in America, I should say they were shovelling snow."

They hopped out of bed, and to the window. It *was* shovelling, and it *was snow*. "Very unusual," they were assured later. But then, winters in Southern Europe quite often are unusual. Even sunshiny ones.

The picture of "Romola" follows the main incidents of George Eliot's novel. Lillian, of course, had the part of Romola, Dorothy that of Tessa, Ronald Colman that of Carlo Bucelline. To William H. Powell was assigned the part of Tito; Herbert Grimwood was given the part of Savonarola, and looked so much like him that when he walked along the streets of Florence, children would point him out. Altogether, the cast was a fine one.

They had expected to use a number of real scenes in Florence—the Duomo, the Piazza Signoria, etc., but found that modern innovations—telegraph wires and poles, street car tracks, and the like—made this impracticable. On their big lot in the outskirts of the city, they built an ancient Florence, a very beautiful Florence, of the days of Savonarola. They did use the Ponte Vecchio, the ancient bridge, though a second story had been added a generation later than the period of their picture. And they used the Arno in several scenes.

Rain or no rain, their lot became a busy place. They brought the "White Sister" equipment from Rome, and a small army of artisans and laborers began to work wonders. In a brief time, a quaint old street sprang up—along it shops of every sort, just as they might have been four hundred years before . . . real shops, in which were made every variety of paraphernalia required for the picture: costumes, harness, basketry, hats, footwear, furniture—everything needed to restore the semblance of a dead generation. They even set up a little restaurant, and ate their luncheons there. Animals—dogs and cats—walked about, or slept in the sun. Flocks of pigeons were in the air, or on the house-tops. During the brief visit of the year before, they had asked that these be raised on the lot. It was all realistic, and lovely. Wood-carvers were at work on the rich interiors, some of them more beautiful, even, than those of "The White Sister": a great church interior, and a banquet hall, for Romola's wedding. At one side of the lot were small buildings, where the distinguished artist, Robert Haas, with his staff, worked at the drawings. For the great wedding feast, they could not get period glasses in Florence, so sent a man to Venice, and had them specially blown. Lillian remembers the banquet hall as very rich, exquisite in detail—the scene as a whole, one of peculiar distinction.

"We had for it a lot of titled people of Florence, who were eager to be in the picture. We had very little trouble to get anything we needed in the way of extras. In some of the scenes, we had hundreds of them.

"One thing we did not get so easily: For the wedding, we needed 15th Century priest robes. We heard of some up in the hills, but we could get them only on condition



that we engage four detectives to guard them, two by day, two by night.

"We had to guard ourselves, for that matter. Florence has many Americans, and they have not much to do. If we had let in all who called, we should have had a perpetual sequence of social events, with very little work. We had many invitations, but could not accept them. I think we went out just once, for dinner. When we had a little time in the afternoon, we liked to go to Doni's, for tea, or to shop a little, for linens and laces. Whatever of such things we have now, Mother bought that winter in Florence.

"Every night we literally prayed that the next day would dawn clear and bright, so that we might make up our lost time. But no! Maybe, as Dorothy said, the Italian 'dispenser of weather,' didn't understand English.

"One cannot too highly praise the Italian workmen. Over and over, ours would work on a set that it might be the exact replica of a 15th Century design. Italian workmen are willing to be told, and possess an astonishing ambition to do a thing exactly as it should be done."

They began "shooting" the scenes. They had no regular scenario. They worked, as it were, inspirationally. They did not know very exactly what they were going to do when they began a scene, and they were not quite sure what they had done when they finished it. The element of accident sometimes produces happy results, but it is unsafe to count on it. "Romola" developed into a kind of panorama—a succession of lovely pictures, without very definite climaxes.

They worked hard. For one thing, they were experimenting with a new film, the panchromatic, which had

never been used for an entire picture, and they did their own developing. One of the chief beauties of "Romola" is the richness of its photography.

What with the weather and all, the making of "Romola" was hardly what the French call "gai."

There were lighter moments: In the scene where Dorothy is supposed to drown in the Arno, she tried for an hour to sink in that greasy, unclean river. She couldn't swim, so it had to be done in shallow water. She didn't like to pop her head under, either, but they told her if she would fill her lungs with air and hold her breath, there would be no danger. She was plump, and her bones were small. Being filled with air made her still more buoyant. Also, she had on a little silk skirt that got air under it and ballooned on top of the water. Dorothy simply couldn't drown. When she popped her head under, the little skirt stuck up in a point like the tail of a diving duck. Such an effect would never do for a picture like "Romola." From their window in the Grand Hotel, Mrs. Gish and Lillian, watching through a glass, laughed hysterically at Dorothy's efforts to drown. Dorothy finally struck: she could stand no more of the Arno water. The scene was finished one chilly day in America—in Long Island Sound. Dorothy had a cold at the time, and they thought she would contract pneumonia. But that was a poor guess. When she came out of the water, the cold was gone. Clean, salt water, Dorothy said.

In the picture, Dorothy, as Tessa, has a baby. They borrowed the cook's baby, the youngest of nine, a fat, robust bambino, strapped to a board, Italian fashion; easy enough to carry, properly held, but not handy for cuddling. Juliana was her name, and as lovely as one of Raphael's

cherubs—lovely, even among Italian children, all of whom have little madonna faces, because for generations expectant mothers have knelt ardently before altars and wayside shrines. Lillian and Dorothy became fond of Juliana, took walks with her, carrying her, board and all—a burden which increased daily as Juliana got fatter and fatter. They wished Juliana would not grow quite so fast; there were scenes where they had to run with her. Italian babies are seldom warm, in winter. One day, Juliana broke out with a rash, which at first they thought was measles, but was only the result of the studio heat, heat from the great Klieg lights.

Lillian had a maid named Anna, a large, lovely soul, but a menace. If one got an ache or a pain, Anna came running with an enormous Italian pill, the size of those on the Medici coat-of-arms. After a day at the studio, in the strained "Romola" poses, Lillian once mentioned having a back-ache. Anna commanded her to undress and lie down. A very little later she came bringing a bath towel, and a flat-iron, the latter quite definitely warm. Then, turning the world's darling face down, she spread the towel on her back and proceeded to iron her. It was drastic, but beneficial. The ironings became a part of the daily program. Anna decided that her mistress needed blood, and cooked for her apples in red wine. They were delicious.

"Romola" was finished near the end of May. The last scene was the burning of Savonarola, terribly realistic. Lillian got so near the fire that she was scorched. A few days later they saw the rushes and she was ready to go. The great Italian episode was over. It was unique, and remains so. Big companies do not go on foreign locations

any more. They build Italy or any part of the universe on their lots in Hollywood.

Lillian in America found that she had been chosen by Sir James Barrie for the picture version of "Peter Pan." No one could have been better suited to the part, and it greatly appealed to her. But there were complications. Regretfully she put it aside.

Pleasant things happened: Dimitri Dirujinski and Boris Lorski modeled busts of her; Nicolai Fechin did her portrait, as Romola. The last was given a special exhibition in the Grand Central Art Galleries, with a reception to Lillian and the artist under the patronage of Cecelia Beaux and New York's social leaders. It was bought by the Chicago Art Institute and today hangs in the Goodman Theatre of that city.

"Romola," released through the Metro-Goldwyn Company, had two great premières: at the George M. Cohan Theatre, New York, on Monday, December 1st, 1924, and at the Sid Grauman Theatre, Hollywood, on the following Saturday. Lillian and Dorothy, with their mother, managed to attend both. The Los Angeles opening was so much more a part of the "picture" world that we shall skip to it, forthwith.

It was unique. Manager Grauman had stirred up all Los Angeles and Hollywood over the return of the Gish girls with a new picture.

They had anticipated no reception at the train. King was already in Los Angeles; he might be there . . . a few friends, maybe, not more. But when the train drew in, they noticed a great assembly of expectant people, most of them wearing badges—a rally of some sort, a conven-

tion. Lillian and Dorothy stepped to the train platform, and were greeted with a shower of rose-buds, thrown by gay little girls who had baskets of them; a vigorous and competent band struck up; a siren began to blow; everybody shouted and pushed forward; all those badges had on them the word GISH; all the battery of cameras that began to grind was turned on them; the rally was their rally—a welcome—welcome home to Los Angeles.

Producers and directors were there. Irving Thalberg, handsome, youthful-looking, pressed forward. Mrs. Gish, thinking him from the hotel, handed him her checks, and a moment later was apologizing. But he said it was all right—he was always being taken for his own office boy. John Gilbert was there, and Norma Shearer, and Eleanor Boardman, and ever so many more. A crowd of students from the Military Academy rallied around; also, a swarm of "bathing beauties" from the Ambassador, and a fire engine came clanging up, for the Fire and Police Departments had been called out. A news notice says:

A squad of motorcycle policemen and fast cars of the Fire Department, made an escort for the automobile provided for Lillian Gish, Dorothy and their mother, through the downtown district. Sirens and bells added to the noise of welcome.

Not much like the old days, when with Uncle High Herrick, they had landed with "Her First False Step" at a one-night stand.

They drove to the Ambassador Hotel. Mary Pickford had not been at the train, but they found her standing in the middle of their "flower embowered drawing-room"—never more beautiful in all her life, Lillian thought.

By and by, Mary, Lillian and Dorothy, motored out to the old Fine Arts Studio, where "The Birth of a Nation" and so many of Griffith's other pictures, had been made. They found the old place hidden behind a brick building. "Intolerance" had been made there, and "Broken Blossoms." Douglas Fairbanks and many others had begun, there, their film careers. They recalled these things as they looked about a little sadly, at what had once been their film home.

Manager Sid Grauman had gone to all the expense and trouble he could think of to make this a record occasion. "Romola" was following Douglas Fairbanks' "Thief of Bagdad." It must not fall short.

*"A première without a parallel. A night of all nights. The most gala festivity Hollywood has ever known. An opening beside which other far-famed Egyptian premières will pale into insignificance."* These are a few bits of Manager Grauman's rhetoric, and he added: "Every star, director and producer, will be there to pay homage to Lillian and Dorothy Gish."

They were there. The broad entrance to the Egyptian was a blaze of light and gala dress parade. The crowds massed on both sides to see the greatest of filmland pass. Doug and Mary (who had already run "Romola" in their home theatre), Charlie, Jackie . . . never mind the list, they were all there. High above, the name of LILLIAN GISH blazed out in tall letters. When she arrived, and Dorothy, and their mother, their cars were fairly mobbed. Cameras were going, everybody had to pause a moment at the entrance for something special in that line. Manager Grauman was photographed between the two stars of the





"ROMOLA"





evening, properly set off and by no means obliterated, small man though he was, by the resplendent gowns.

After which, came the performance. Manager Grauman had fairly laid himself out on an introductory feature. There were ten numbers of it, each more astonishing than the preceding: "Italian Tarantella," "Harlequin and Columbine," "The Eighteen Dance Wonders," but why go on? It was a gorgeous show all in itself.

After which, the beautiful processional effects of Romola's story.

There was no lack of enthusiasm in the audience. When the picture ended and the lights went on, and Lillian and Dorothy appeared before the curtain, the applause swelled to very great heights indeed. And when a speech was demanded, Lillian, in her quiet, casual way, said:

"Dear ladies and gentlemen, both Dorothy and I do so hope you have liked 'Romola.' If you have, then, dear, kind friends, you have made us very happy, very happy indeed . . . and you have made Mr. King, who directed 'Romola,' very happy, too."

From the applause that followed, it was clear that there was no question as to the importance of the occasion—all the more so, had they known that, for Hollywood, at least, it was the last public appearance of these two together.

The critics did not know what to make of "Romola"—did not quite dare to say what they thought they felt. To William Powell, as Tito, nearly all gave praise; some regretted that Ronald Colman did not have a better part. Dorothy, as Tessa, had given a good account of herself, they said, and Charles Lane, as Baldassare. Of Lillian's spirituality and acting there was no question, but there

were those who thought the part of Romola unequal to her gifts.

As to the picture, one ventured to call it "top-heavy," whatever he meant by that. One had courage enough to think it "a bit dull." Another declared that it contained all the atmosphere and beauty of the Florence of Lorenzo de Medici. "Romola" was, in fact, exquisite tapestry, and the dramatic interest of tapestry is a mild one.

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## IV

### ALSO, THE INTELLIGENTSIA

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A BRIEF lawsuit in which Lillian was involved at this time added greatly to her prestige. In October (1924), for what she felt to be just cause, she had broken off relations with her producers. Suit for breach of contract followed. At the trial, held in a small, crowded room of the Woolworth Building, the chief executive of the picture corporation testified to a number of remarkable things, among them that Miss Gish had engaged herself to marry him, all of which notably failed to convince Judge Julian W. Mack, who, on the second or third morning of the trial, rose and summarily dismissed the case against Lillian, and after a few well-chosen words to her accuser, held him "to bail in the sum of \$10,000" (I quote the minutes) "to answer to the charge of perjury." He was indicted, but Lillian, with no wish, as she said, to send anyone to prison, declined to appear against him, and the case was dismissed.

Lillian's following was now enormous . . . of the whole world, for in no obscure corner of it was her face unfamiliar, or unwelcomed.

There was something almost magical about this universal homage. Men and women alike paid tribute. Reporters ransacked dictionaries for terms that would convey her elusive loveliness—likened it (one of them) to "the haunting sadness of an old Spanish song, heard as the light fades from the evening sky."

What heaps of letters! And if, as has been said, she was

wanting in sex-appeal, why all the marriage proposals? Why so much poetry? Just one young man wrote eleven little volumes of poetry—pretty good poetry, if there is such a thing, even if not entirely sane (what poetry is?)—and it was printed by hand with the utmost care and beauty.

Also, she was being discovered by the “intelligentsia,” whatever that word means. If, as appears, it has to do with intelligence, it would seem to apply to the great masses who had hailed her as an artist and raved over her, almost from the beginning. Never mind—she was now definitely recognized as an Artist—taken up by the elect, who in the long run, have something to say about Art, and affix the official stamp. And having discovered her, they proceeded to burn incense and chant orisons to her as their special saint and *déesse*, just as the others had been doing for a good ten years and more.

As early as 1921, Edward Wagenknecht, a young don of the Chicago University, met her, and straightway hailed her as the “artist’s artist.” Further he declared: “Words, especially prose, seem horribly wooden in discussing her. . . . Hers is a personality which can be adequately described only in terms of music, or poetry, which is a form of music. In her presence one wants instinctively to talk blank verse.” There was a great deal more to it which I should like to quote, for it was sincere, and trimly phrased. Mr. Wagenknecht has since written a whole chapbook on the subject of Miss Gish, a distinguished performance.\* My impression is that he was the advance guard of her later “discoverers.”

\* “Lillian Gish, An Interpretation”: Number Seven, University of Washington Chapbooks. Edited by Glenn Hughes (1927).

I don't know when Joseph Hergesheimer first came under the Lillian spell, but probably about the time he used her as his model for "Cytherea," which I regard as something less of a compliment than his article in the *American Mercury*, April, 1924. In this article, he is supposed to be talking to Lillian.

"No one," I told her, "who has worked with you, has the slightest idea of what your charm really is. Two men, and not unsuccessfully, have written about it, about you . . . James Branch Cabell and myself. James thinks it is Helen of Troy; and if he is right, then you, too, are Helen. I mean that you have the quality which, in a Golden Age, would hold an army about the walls of a city for seven years."

Hergesheimer was proposing a picture, in which, as he assured her, she would be "like the April moon, a thing for all young men to dream about forever . . . the fragrant April moon of men's hopes . . . 'No one, seeing you, will ever again be deeply interested in other girls.' I recalled to her the legend of Diana—how a countryman, hearing Diana's horn through the woods, lost in vague restlessness his familiar content. 'You will be the clear and unforgettable silver horn.'"

It was in the guise of Jurgen that James Branch Cabell celebrated Lillian, wrote of her as Queen Helen, "the delight of gods and men, who regarded him with grave, kind eyes" . . . whom, long ago, Jurgen had loved, in "the garden between dawn and sunrise."

Then, trembling, Jurgen raised toward his lips the hand of her who was the world's darling. . . . "Oh, all my life was a foiled quest of you, Queen Helen, and an unsatiated hungering. And for a while I served my vision, honoring you with

clean-handed deeds. Yes, certainly it should be graved upon my tomb, 'Queen Helen ruled this earth while it stayed worthy.' But that was very long ago.

"And so farewell to you, Queen Helen! Your beauty has been to me a robber that stripped my life of joy and sorrow, and I desire not ever to dream of your beauty any more."

Cabell, builder of magic phrases! His words look like other words, but they assemble with a strange ardency, and they march to the pipes of Pan. I am taking Hergesheimer's word for it that it was Lillian who inspired Cabell's Helen, though I might have guessed that, anyway.

And then it happened that George Jean Nathan, hard-bitten dramatic critic, hater of movies, suddenly became Lillian-conscious and proceeded to do something about it—something rather special—in *Vanity Fair*. Wrote Nathan:

That she is one of the few real actresses that the films have brought forth, either here or abroad, is pretty well agreed upon by the majority of critics. But it seems to me that, though the fact is taken for granted, the reasons for her eminence have in but small and misty part been set into print. . . . The girl is superior to her medium, pathetically so. . . . The particular genius of Lillian Gish lies in making the definite charmingly indefinite. Her technique consists in thinking out a characterization directly and concretely and then executing it in terms of semi-vague suggestion. . . . The smile of the Gish girl is a bit of happiness trembling on a bed of death; the tears of the Gish girl . . . are the tears that old Johann Strauss wrote into the rosemary of his waltzes. The whole secret of the young woman's remarkably effective acting rests, as I have observed, in her carefully devised and skilfully negotiated technique of playing always, as it were, behind a veil of silver chiffon. . . . She is always present, she always dominates the scene, yet one



feels somehow that she is ever just out of sight around the corner. One never feels that one is seeing her *entirely*. There is ever something pleasantly, alluringly missing, as there is always in the case of women who are truly "acting artists."

There was a good deal more in this strain. Widely quoted, it made quite a stir. Later—as much as a year, perhaps—Nathan being a bachelor (about the only one the intelligentsia could muster), it was reported from time to time that he was to be married to Miss Gish; then, that they were already married, privately, reports that have been recurrent, or intermittent, or something, ever since. But Nathan was a bachelor, apparently without much intention of becoming anything else, while Lillian was far too occupied for domesticity, the kind of domesticity she saw about her. She was satisfied with her circle as it stood—a circle which included individualities: rude-handed old Dreiser, for instance, and Mencken, and Sinclair Lewis, and Clarence Darrow. No Madame Récamier ever had a more loyal following, ever accepted it with such gratitude. And never a thing they said or did wrought a change in her, touched that vanity which is a mortal possession, but is hardly her possession, because, as I suspect, she is not altogether mortal, but a visitant—a dryad, likely enough, who has strayed in from the Old Time and is only puzzled a little, and saddened, maybe, by what she finds here.

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V

“LA BOHÊME”

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WHEN in February (1925) the break with her producer had been rumored, telegrams with offers of engagements began to come.

Lillian was not at the moment in a position to consider a new arrangement. When the press announced the conclusion of her suit, all the offers came again, with others. Mary Pickford, as member of the United Artists, fervently believed that Lillian's salvation lay with their company. "There is no question but this is where you should be," she telegraphed. Offers came from both the Schencks, and from many others. By advice of her lawyers, Lillian finally accepted that of the Metro-Goldwyn Company, at a figure larger than she had hoped for. Her contract covered a period of two years, during which she was to make, if required, as many as six pictures, for the sum of \$800,000. It further specified that she would not be required to attend anything in the way of publicity dinners, press teas, and the like. She could see interviewers in reasonable numbers, at her convenience. One day a flaming banner, stretching from the Metro offices across the street, announced that Lillian Gish had become a Metro-Goldwyn star.

She realized that she must begin with something important. To extend her European audience, she hoped to do something with international appeal. In Paris, she had discussed with Madame de Grésac and the musical composer,

Charpentier, the possibility of making a film from his opera, "Louise," but the element of free love in it was an objection, and Charpentier declined to have it modified. The character of Mimi, in "La Bohême," had long been in the back of Lillian's mind—Mimi of the opera, rather than of Murger's original. Madame de Grésac agreed that the part was peculiarly suited to Lillian, and was eager to join in preparing the script. In New York, now, they went over it all again, and presently were in California, at the Beverly Hills Hotel, hard at work on it. They had plenty of time. Production was to begin in June, but the director and some of the players wanted were not yet free.

Lillian, with time on her hands, an unusual circumstance, spent some of it at Pickfair, with Douglas and Mary. Once they went camping. They went down the shore to a place called Laguna, a sheltered spot on the beach, about three hours by motor from Los Angeles. It was very secluded—cliffs behind them; nobody in sight anywhere. They had to leave the cars and climb down a big cliff. Mrs. Pickford and little Mary (Mary's niece) were along, and about ten others.

It could be hardly be called roughing it, though it was real camping. They had fourteen little tents, a real village—string-town on the sea. They had servants to look after them, and a dining tent, a sitting-room, a kitchen, and individual sleeping tents. The weather was perfect. They were there from Thursday until Monday, and were in the open every minute. They wore only bathing suits and bathrobes, and were in the sea a good half the time. The tide came up to the doors of the tents.

"One always has a good time where Douglas is," Lillian

said. "He is like a boy. I remember Princess Bibesco and Anthony Asquith once came to Hollywood and were invited by Douglas and Mary to make a party to climb the mountain behind Pickfair, and go down on the other side, for camp breakfast. We had to start very early. I drove from the Beverley Hills Hotel and it was still dark when I got to Pickfair. I dressed in Doug's riding clothes to do the climbing. The Asquiths were to go on horseback, but Douglas made Mary and me walk.

"We were well up the mountain before daylight, and the going was terribly scratchy. I had never climbed a California mountain. I did not know they would scratch one up so. I was a sight when we got down on the other side, and very happy to get breakfast."

Irving Thalberg, head supervisor of the Metro-Goldwyn, Lillian said, let her choose from the directors and people on their lots. After seeing a number of scenes from "The Big Parade," then in production, she selected King Vidor, to direct, and asked to have John Gilbert and Renée Adorée. Roy d'Arcy and Edward Horton were also chosen, and Karl Dane. Vidor expected to finish "The Big Parade" very soon, but pictures have a way of not getting finished, and it was August before they were ready for rehearsal. Then she found that they did not rehearse any more—not in the old way she had learned from Griffith—not at all until they were ready to shoot the scene. Salaries had increased to a point where it was cheaper to make the scene, time and again, than to rehearse it for days in advance. Vidor said, however, that Lillian might do her scenes in the old way. She tried it, but found the others so unused to it that she gave it up.

King Vidor, in a recent letter to the author, tells of Lillian's familiarity with this method:

One of the things that comes to my mind is the amazing ability she possessed of rehearsing a picture through without having any of the sets, properties, and sometimes actors, before her. The first time we tried this method of rehearsal, which was at her suggestion, we chose a secluded spot on a patch of bare lawn in the studio grounds. I asked Miss Gish to go ahead with the rehearsal and, to my amazement, she started through doors that did not exist, closing them behind her, picking up articles and using them, opening drawers, taking out things and putting others away, playing scenes with other members of the cast who were not there at the time, walking up and down stairways that did not exist, and even going out into the street and riding away in a bus, and playing scenes with people in carriages as they moved along. This showed a power of imagination that was almost mystifying. It reminded me of times when I had seen little girls playing at housekeeping, only in this case it was entirely useful and helpful in the making of the picture.

The story of "La Bohême" is almost universally known—the play and the opera have taken care of that. Lillian and Madame de Grésac stuck rather closely to the latter. Little Mimi, *pauvre brodeuse*, living alone in a cold, miserable place against the roof, meets and loves, and is beloved by, one of the bohemians, a writer, of the adjoining attic. To advance his fortunes, she gives her strength, her life, for him, wins success for him, is cast off because he believes her unfaithful, then at the end, when she knows that her death is near, drags herself back to him, to die. There is no more heartbreaking story, and no story better suited to Lillian's gifts.

The scenic designers had made small pasteboard sets, miniatures, to give the directors, electricians, camera-men,

and all concerned, an idea of the possibilities of each scene. When Lillian looked at the miniature of Mimi's attic, she said:

"But isn't it rather large? Mimi lives in a very small corner under the roof."

"Ah, but this is in an old castle."

"Why, yes, to be sure—only, there could hardly have been a castle in that locality, and even so, Mimi and her friends would not have been living in one. Just up under the roof of very old and rather poor houses."

"But you see, you have been in big productions, with very fine sets. We don't want to put you into anything small and poor-looking. The road exhibitors would not feel they were getting their money's worth."

"Romola's" elaborate background had worked on their imagination. They gave up their old castle, though sadly. The matter of costumes offered another surprise: A very expensive designer from Paris had been engaged—French, of Russian origin—Lillian rejoiced in the thought that she would get just the right thing. But, oh dear, when she came to see them! Monsieur was a small, dainty man, and he seemed to have designed them for himself. Also, it appeared to be his idea that Mimi was a vamp. Phyllis Moir, Lillian's secretary of that time, says that it was Lillian herself who, in the end, planned Mimi's costumes. Of this, Lillian only said:

"Finally, the woman at the head of our wardrobe department took some of the costumes I had—things I had picked up, here and there—and together we got what I wanted. Mimi's picnic costume was the only new one. Our little designer was deeply offended. I was impossible to work with, he said.



"All on the Metro lot were so kind to me. Little Norma Shearer dressed next door, and helped me in many ways. Marion Davies was another who was considerate and kind. They had been there several years before I came, and were a great comfort. After 'Bohême' was produced, Marion Davies wrote me a very beautiful letter."

In *Picture Play*, Margaret Reid, an extra in "La Bohême," has written a luminous article, from which I am going to quote, trusting in her good heart to forgive me:

Miss Gish arrived on the same day that the elaborate dressing-room suite designed for her was rushed to completion. . . . After a polite but systematic search of the studio I discovered her on the lawn, talking to one of the heads. She wore a severely plain white coat and a close hat of plain rose felt, and carried a heavy black book in her arms. No make-up, not even powder, marred the healthy, translucent, perfect complexion. . . .

Lillian thinks that the first scene of "La Bohême" was made in Mimi's attic, which is doubtless correct, for Miss Reid speaks of something having been done before she was called—before various of the ladies and gentlemen were instructed to come out and be fitted for attire of the year 1830.

I happened to be among the fortunate, and was soon gowned in a lovely costume of hideous brown serge and a gray flannel cape. The keepers of the M-G-M wardrobe are the nicest wardrobe women in Hollywood, but even their elastic patience is tried on days when the picture and scene require a mediocre costuming of extras. Their sympathetic ears are deafened with cries of:

"But, Mother Coulter, I *can't* wear this—why, it's awful!



Can't I at least have a pretty cape to cover up this horror?" "Mrs. Piper, you wouldn't make me actually wear such an ugly dress!" Each feels that anything less than the very best is not her type.

But today we were Parisiens of precarious means, offering up the old wedding ring and Grandfather's stick-pin in a dingy little pawnshop in the Latin Quarter. . . . The magician, Sartov, Miss Gish's special camera-man, sat on his high stool by the camera, pulling placidly at his meerschaum pipe. The last touches were being applied to the dreary little set. . . . Miss Gish was called, and we made our first acquaintance with Mimi. Such a sad and thread-bare little Mimi . . . faint shadows hollowed her cheeks, and her eyes were haggard with fatigue and hunger. In her arms was clasped a poor bundle which she timidly offered up. The coin thrust at her was too small, and with tears in her eyes and quivering lips, she tenderly placed her shabby, moth-eaten little muff on the counter. The orchestra breathed faintly one of Mimi's gentle laments—oh, the pitiful little Mimi! I fumbled blindly for a handkerchief, feeling I couldn't stand it any longer without doing something about it—anything to allay the misery of that wistful face.

When the camera stopped, she peeped around it, the tears still shining in her eyelashes.

"Was that all right, Mr. Vidor? Or shall we try it again?"

"Well, let's try it this way, too, and see how it looks," in Mr. Vidor's soft, lazy Southern accent.

So Mimi is unhappy this way and that way and several other ways, until she receives her scanty loan and turns slowly and goes out of the door. That was all of Mimi, for that time.

When next we saw her, it was at a picnic in the woods of "Ville D'Avray" . . . a place of orange groves at the foot of mountains that stretch up into the lofty snow fields.

In a grassy meadow, sheltered by oak trees, the picnic was spread. Miss Gish's town car, with its shades drawn, was already parked at one side. Through the back window of an expensive coupé, a black head swathed in a towel indicated the transformation of John Gilbert into Rodolphe. . . .

When Miss Gish stepped out of her car and began to work, it was like the arrival of a limpid, fragrant wood elf, so exquisite was her costume and so beautiful was she herself. . . .

When I start to write of Mimi as I last saw her, I am reminded of the sensations I had as a child, when Mother used to tell me in vain that whatever I was reading was only a play or a story. . . . Thus I keep assuring myself that Miss Gish is a young lady who makes enough money to live on very comfortably, and that she has beauty, fame and adoring friends.

Yet there keeps recurring the picture of our last work in "La Bohême," of the dying Mimi, struggling across Paris to Rodolphe. Her miserable clothes are in rags, and illness has carved deep hollows in her face. Clinging to the steps of a bus, fighting weakly through crowds, falling into the gutter and crawling on upon hands and knees, dragged holding to a chain behind a cart, slowly making her way, her long, pale-gold hair falling down over her shoulders and back.

Between shots you might have thought her still playing a bit in the picture, so unpretentious was her manner. If her skirt had to be dirty for a close shot, she did not hail a prop boy, but knelt on the cobblestones and made it grimy herself. . . .

Toward the end of the sequence—scratched and bruised from her numerous falls and tumbles, her clothes ragged and mud-stained, her beautiful hair tangled and dusty, she waited so patiently for the lights to be arranged for each shot, now standing on the rough, sharp cobbles, now collapsed on the step. Sitting in the gutter, waiting for Mr. Vidor's signal, she smoothed her apron—a tattered piece of black cotton—with a delicate gesture.

The preservation of an illusion through reality is always a feat, an illusion being of such a fragile, rarefied substance. Usually we learn to be satisfied with treasured remnants. Thus, it is with pride in my good fortune, and with gratitude to Lillian for being what she is, that I present to you an illusion, not only intact but even increased in value—Miss Gish!

With her usual thoroughness, Lillian had prepared for the difficult rôle of Mimi, especially for the tragic end. Mimi's illness was a malady of the lungs, brought on through exposure, hunger and unremitting toil. Before the great death scene, Lillian had gone to see a priest about getting a chance to study the progress of the disease. Most of the priests knew her, after "The White Sister," and this one was especially kind. He took her to the County Hospital. All were proud and eager to help her. They told her the symptoms at the different stages. It was all rather terrible.

Both Miss Moir—Miss Gish's secretary—and Mr. Vidor, in letters to the writer, have written of the result of this intense hospital study. Mr. Vidor's picture follows:

Another episode I shall never forget: The death scene was scheduled for a certain morning, but because the set was incomplete, it was postponed till the following day. Miss Gish had not been told of this postponement, and had thought so much and concentrated so vigorously to make this scene realistic, that she arrived at the studio whiter than I had ever seen her and looking at least ten pounds thinner. She was unable to speak above a whisper; in fact, she talked very little. We tried to do other scenes, but Miss Gish had lived that death so continuously during the night before that I was unable to instill enough life into her to make any other scenes that day. This terrific concentration continued all that day and that night. Upon my arrival at the studio next morning I was informed there would be another delay until that afternoon on this particular set. Again we made quick plans to switch, but when I saw Miss Gish we cancelled them. One look at her and my fears began to rise. I began to think that if we didn't hurry and take this death scene we should never be able to finish the picture, so thoroughly was she experiencing the tortures of a tubercular death.



"LA BOHÈME"

Mimi at the pawnshop



That afternoon the set was complete and we hastened—with great solemnity, I may add—to photograph Mimi's death. I was jammed between a camera and a slanting wall in a narrow attic corner. Mimi was carried in by her friends, the bohemians, and placed upon her little bed. After her friends had taken a last farewell, Rodolphe entered the scene, and with him close to her Mimi breathed her last. Rodolphe, played by John Gilbert, was supposed to remain in the scene a few moments and then leave. In the playing of the scene, however, some of the bohemians, and also Mr. Gilbert, were so impressed that they completely forgot what they were to do. I, myself, was in the same frame of mind.

I had noticed that when death overcame Mimi, Miss Gish had completely stopped breathing and the movement of her eyes and eyelids was absolutely suspended. This, even from the close view I had. The moments clicked but still Miss Gish had not moved, nor breathed. My mind immediately jumped to the great drama of this situation. To me, Miss Gish had actually died in the portrayal of a scene. I saw all the headlines in the newspapers of the following day. I saw all the drama and the hush that would fall throughout the studios when the news spread around.

The cameras ground on—the moments turned into minutes. Finally, after an untold length of time, the other actors left the scene and the cameras stopped. Everyone was breathless, fearful of what might have happened. Miss Gish could plainly hear that the cameras had stopped, and could now take breath and open her eyes. But this she did not do. Not daring to speak I fearfully walked over to where she lay and touched her gently on the arm. Her head turned slowly, and her lips formed a faint smile.

I think we all broke into tears of great joy.

To me this is the most realistic scene I have ever known to be enacted before a camera. I hope I shall never see a similar one quite so well done. The inside of her mouth was completely dry, and before she was able to speak again it was necessary to wet her lips which had stuck to her teeth from dryness. The



next morning Miss Gish was as bright and cheery as ever, and we were able to go ahead with the rest of the picture.

One last word: personal contact with Lillian Gish did not destroy any of the idealism she created on the screen for me. To those who have known her only in that way, I promise there is no disappointment in meeting her face to face.

Miss Moir remembers that these final scenes of Mimi's life lasted about a week, and that everyone was relieved when they were over. Lillian herself was so exhausted that her voice had sunk almost to a whisper, and she had hardly sufficient strength to walk. "Poor Renée Adorée was constantly coming back to her dressing room for a fresh supply of handkerchiefs. During the sequence where Mimi is dragging herself back to Rodolphe, to die—the bus, to the back of which she was clinging, suddenly lost a wheel, and it was only by a miracle that she escaped having both legs crushed under the heavy vehicle."

It was near the end of December, 1925, that "La Bohême" was finished, and it was two months later, February 24, at the Embassy Theatre, New York, that it had its first showing. Lillian was not present. To this day, she has never seen "La Bohême" given with its musical accompaniment—not the original Puccini score, the cost of which was prohibitive, but a very lovely adaptation expressing something of the feeling and mood.

"La Bohême," a picture of much sorrow and little brightness, was sympathetically received and left a deep and lasting impression. Except, possibly, in "Broken Blossoms," Lillian had never appeared so effectively—in a picture so suited to her gifts.

It was a big night at the Embassy. Social New York



was 'out in force, and all the picture people. The *Post* next day said:

“Every movie player in New York, and there are many here just now, was ‘among those present,’ for the infrequent appearance of Lillian Gish on the screen takes on the importance of an event. . . . The Gish can do no wrong, in the opinion of many who subscribe to the art of motion pictures. . . .”

Approval of Lillian's Mimi, though wide, was not unanimous. Certain critics were inclined to hold her responsible for the departure from Murger's original. There was hot debate among the fans. Lillian, already absorbed in another picture, gave slight attention to all this; much less than did the interviewers, one of whom found her “not particularly interested.” She merely asked absently: “Has someone been criticizing me?” Which, declared Miss Glass, the interviewer, was as astonishing as if she had looked at the Pacific Ocean and asked: “Is it wet?”

“Her manifest lack of resentment toward her critics confounded me. . . . She sat quietly toying with the folds of her dress, betraying no sign of annoyance or concern.”

In itself, the Mimi of Madame de Grésac was a classic rôle. Not again in her screen life would Lillian find a part more perfectly suited to her personality and special gifts. Her portrayal of it warranted Pola Negri's verdict:

“Lillian Gish is supreme. That was my opinion when I first saw her. It is still my opinion when I have seen all the other stars. She is sublime in her genre.”

The New York première was not the picture's first showing. There had been a preview at Santa Monica, and

one secured by Lillian for the employees of the Beverley Hills Hotel, where she lived. These latter sent her a joint acknowledgment, signed: "Thankfully your admirers, more than a hundred strong."

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## VI

### "THE SCARLET LETTER"

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LILLIAN had not found time to go to New York. Through no fault of hers, the production of "La Bohême" had been delayed, and there was not a moment to lose, now. "La Bohême" was finished on Saturday, and the first shots of "The Scarlet Letter" were made the following Monday. She had agreed to do as many as six pictures, and she had two years to do them in. She was very anxious to fulfill her part of the contract.

Her mother was with her. She had come out with her in May, but in September had gone back to London, where Dorothy was making "Nell Gwynn" for an English company. Now again she was back, vainly, unwisely trying to share herself with both daughters. In January, Lillian had taken Mrs. Pickford's house at Santa Monica, directly on the beach. She believed it would be better for her mother—not always warm, but there was nearly always sunshine, and the air was good.

Every morning Lillian went into the sea. The water was cold, but by six she had put on her bathing suit, and plunged in. A dip, then out again, a race to the house, a cup of hot water that Nellie, the maid, had ready. Then quickly into a little roadster and away to the Culver City lot, a brisk twenty-minute drive. Nellie there prepared breakfast while her mistress was dressing and making up.

In her little corner of Beekman Terrace, the "den," as she calls it, overlooking the East River where a procession

of water traffic moves always up and down—stout, saucy tugs, with square-nosed barges or droopy, submissive schooners in tow; swift Sound steamers; smudgy freighters; private yachts—very romantic and expensive-looking; all the motley parade of the marine register—Lillian not so long ago told of the making of “The Scarlet Letter.” She said:

“It was while we were making ‘La Bohême’ that I worked with Frances Marion on the story. Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne appealed to me, and I thought the story had great picture possibilities. There was one objection: the Church would oppose it—the Protestant Church, especially the Methodist. ‘The Scarlet Letter’ was one of a list of proscribed books—forbidden for picture use. I took the matter up with Will Hays, and prominent members of the Clergy. Why should the Church prohibit a great classic, like that? When I told them how I proposed to present it, they gave their sanction. When they saw the picture, by and by, they recommended it.

“My idea was to present Hester as the victim of hard circumstance, swept off her feet by love. Of course, that was what she was, but her innate innocence must be apparent. I said:

“I believe in ‘The Scarlet Letter,’ if we can get the right man for Dimmesdale, the minister.” We considered several, but none would do.

“One day, Louis B. Mayer, business head of the Metro, said to me: ‘I think I have found the minister for your “Scarlet Letter.”’ Mayer had brought over Greta Garbo, and I had faith in him. Garbo had done a picture of ‘Gosta Berling’ in Sweden, with Lars Hansen, and the Metro had brought over a print of it. ‘Go into the projection room

and have them run it for you,' said Mayer. 'If you like Hansen for the part, we'll bring him over.'

'The moment Lars Hansen appeared on the screen, I knew he was the man we wanted. And I knew that we must have a Swedish director. The Swedish people are closer to what our Pilgrims were, or what we consider them to have been, than our present-day Americans. Irving Thalberg selected Victor Seastrom, a splendid choice. He got the spirit of the story exactly, and was himself a fine actor, the finest that ever directed me. I never worked with anyone I liked better than Seastrom. He was Scandinavian—thorough and prompt. If Mr. Seastrom said we would start at eight, or half-past, the camera was ready at that time, and so were we.

'His direction was a great education for me. In a sense, I went through the Swedish school of acting. I had got rather close to the Italian school in Italy, watching them at their theatres, and from being associated with those who were with us in 'The White Sister' and 'Romola.' The Italian school is one of elaboration; the Swedish is one of repression. Mr. Vidor's method—of the American school, if there is such a thing—leaned to self-expression, which has its advantages.

'We had some of the people used in 'La Bohême'—Karl Dane, for one, who, except for the brief scene where a scrap of my forbidden laundry creates a situation and finally flares out on a currant bush—furnished about all the comedy of that too sad picture. Henry B. Walthall, with whom I had played so often in the old Griffith days, was engaged to do Prynne, Hester's husband. In the old days, he had been taller than I was. I was amazed now to find it the other way about. I had grown a good deal in

the ten or eleven years since then. I suppose exercise, open air, health and proper food, had been responsible. Joyce Coad, my little girl in the play, was a sweet child, and a clever little actress. I became much attached to her.

"Work on 'The Scarlet Letter' went off smoothly until we were within two weeks of the end. Then, one day in April, I got a paralyzing cable from Dorothy in London. Dorothy had been over for a brief visit during the Winter; and Mother had presently followed her back to London. She had not wanted to go—not really. She had not been well for years. Commuting back and forth across six thousand miles, trying to be with both of us, had been too much for her. That last time she would not let me go to the train with her. Dorothy's cable said that she was dying.

"I cabled and got the latest news of her; she had had a stroke. I said I would take the first ship I could get from New York.

"I found that by leaving Los Angeles in three days, I could catch the *Majestic* out of New York, which would put me in London the last day of April. It was the 15th that she had been struck down.

"At the studio, Seastrom said that by working day and night we could do the remaining two weeks on the picture in the three days I had left. I asked the company if they would stay with me through it, and every one said yes. They were all so fine.

"We didn't waste a moment, and during those three days and nights there was very little sleep for anyone. I remember scarcely anything of the details, for of course I had Mother on my mind, too. When the last scene was shot, I made a rush for the train, without stopping to



change from my costume. Mr. Mayer and Mr. Thalberg got special police on motorcycles to escort me and clear the way, so that I could work to the last moment and still get the train. Twelve days later I was in London."

Characteristically, Lillian says nothing of that trip across land and sea. Miss Moir, less reticent, writes:

I shall always remember the kindness and sympathy shown her during those long wearisome days on the train . . . the little Catholic girl at Albuquerque who somehow or other managed to find her way to our compartment and press into Lillian's hand a little silver cross which she said had been specially blessed and would surely bring an answer to her prayers for her mother.

. . . At Topeka, Kansas, when the train pulled in, we noticed that the platform was jammed from end to end with people. We supposed that they must have come to welcome someone and pulled down the blinds in the compartment to escape notice. Suddenly we heard raps on the window and calls for Miss Gish. The conductor appeared, smiling, to say that all these people had come to see Miss Gish, some of them had even driven a hundred miles for the purpose. Tired and heartsick as she was, Lillian went out on the platform of the train. The moment she appeared, a sudden silence fell on the crowd—they just stood and looked at her. Then a woman held up a baby and asked her to touch it "for luck." That broke up the formality. They crowded round her, expressing their sympathy and good wishes, and they were still in the midst of it when the train pulled out leaving them cheering and waving.

We arrived in New York on the morning of the day the *Majestic* sailed. When, late that night we went on board the boat, we found our stateroom filled with people all waiting to see Lillian.

One pleasant young man with an ingratiating smile, insisted upon bringing in his girl-friend to meet Lillian, who, tired as she was, still managed to smile at them.



In London, Lillian learned just what had happened: Dorothy had been out to a play, and had come in quietly and slipped into bed without turning on the light. Mrs. Gish slept in the other twin bed. Presently, Dorothy felt something touch her. She spoke softly, but got no answer. She felt the touch again, and again got no answer. The third time, she snapped on the light. Her mother could not speak—all her right side was helpless. Fortunately, Dorothy's bed had been at her left.

With Lillian's arrival Mrs. Gish improved. Only the day before she had not been expected to live. She seemed to recognize her—her eyes grew large. Every paper had displayed in headlines Lillian's race across the world to her mother's bedside, and the English are a kindly people. Noble and commoner alike came forward with offered help—all ranks knew and loved her. Cards, flowers, gifts, poured in.

What was to be done next? Lillian must return to California, or cancel her contract. What must she—what could she—do? Miss Moir tells what happened:

One night somebody suggested going to a famous little restaurant in the Tottenham Court Rd. district for dinner. So Dorothy, Lillian and I got into a taxi and drove to it, three very forlorn females. . . . It was over that dinner that Lillian came to what seemed at first her preposterous decision to take her mother back with her to California, but as usual, she carried her point, and within a week Mrs. Gish, with a good English doctor and nurse in attendance, Lillian and I, were all aboard the *Mauretania* en route for New York.

Mrs. Gish bore the journey much better than we had expected and the days passed quickly. The morning we arrived at Quarantine Lillian and I were sitting up in bed eating breakfast when our stewardess rushed in looking quite alarmed, to warn

us to bolt all the doors as our stateroom was shortly to be stormed by a mob of reporters.

Lillian herself told of the hectic overland journey:

"In New York I chartered a private car and took Mother to Hollywood. I was no longer so poor, and if ever there was a time when I was thankful for money it was then. Across the blazing southern desert we had tubs of ice, with fans going over them, night and day. The car was cool, and the change, or the thought that she was going back to California, which she always loved, was good for Mother. When we reached California, instead of being on her back, she was sitting up. But she could not speak—she knew all that we said to her, but she could not answer, and she could no longer read. We were told that this condition might last three to six months. That was five years ago. She has improved a great deal; she can walk a little, but most of her right side is helpless, and her words are very limited.

"At Santa Monica we lived in Mrs. Pickford's house until September, then moved up to the beautiful Millbank place on the cliff, with a lovely garden, and all, away from the dampness and the sound of the waves, which made Mother nervous. On her birthday, September 16, she seemed suddenly to pick up, and we felt there was a chance for her to get well.

"She does not suffer, but must get very tired of always being obliged to sit, or lie down. But she is sweet and patient. The nurse and I read to her, and she enjoys working the picture puzzles, of which she has always a supply. She likes motion picture magazines. She cannot read them, but she loves the illustrations—many of them of people

she knows. And always, if the name 'Gish' is on any printed page, she can find it."

"The Scarlet Letter" had its première in August, 1926, at the Central Theatre, New York City. The evening *Sun* next day, among other things, said:

Miss Gish, for the first time in the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the cinema palaces, plays a mature woman, a woman of depth, of feeling and wisdom and noble spirit. . . . She is not Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, but she is yours and mine, and she makes 'The Scarlet Letter' worth a visit.

The *Sun* man's notice was a fair sample of other printed opinions at home and abroad. Critics who were anxious to show that they were familiar with Hawthorne, sometimes worked themselves up over the departure from the original story, and sometimes "took it out" on Lillian and Lars Hansen, but generally they had only good things to say of the acting of these two, of little Joyce Coad and the others, and of Seastrom's fine direction. Seastrom had created New England atmosphere on a Culver City lot, a fact not always suspected. Lillian had hoped that some of the scenes might really be made in New England, but Seastrom's imagination had served as well—perhaps better. No fault was found here—indeed, very little anywhere. Critics who went prepared to do their worst, forgot all about it when they saw Lillian in her little Puritan cap, her expressive back in its little Puritan waist, and especially when she sat in the stocks, "for running and playing on ye Sabbath," leaning feverishly out to drink from the cup of cold water brought her by the conscience-stricken minister. One hardened critic wrote:



"THE SCARLET LETTER"

Miss Gish as Hester Prynne, with the shadow of  
Lars Hansen, as Dimmesdale



I retire from the field with tears in my eyes and rage in my heart, as becomes a cynic betrayed and undone. To consider her critically is beyond my powers—she simply annihilates the instinct. Of this much I am quite sure: She is a great, a very great artist, and by far the most appealing and human little figure appearing on the screen today—and the loveliest.

Three or four years ago, in a big barn of a theatre in Southern France, the writer of these pages first saw "The Scarlet Letter" and went home in a daze, waking up now and then to damn his Puritan ancestors. In the seat next his, had sat a small, intense Frenchwoman, who, at one point, had said, tearfully, to her companion: "Regardez, Léontine, regardez son pauvre petit dos!" (Look, Leontine, look at her poor little back!) And just now I read a paragraph which said: "Lillian Gish can convey more pathos with her back than any other actress with all her features."

I agree with that, and I am not going by my first impression. I have seen the picture again—very recently, with Lillian, in the New York Metro-Goldwyn projection room. Association had destroyed none of the illusion. The effect was the same—heightened.

We left the crash and glare of Ninth Avenue for the comparative seclusion of a cab. Lillian said, presently:

"I was too immature to play that part. She was a woman. I looked just like a child."

"You looked young, certainly, but not too young for Hester—that Hester. Of course, the real Hester—supposing there ever was one—was not at all your Hester. She was less—more—what the others were."

She assented, a little doubtfully. I stumbled on:

"If I might offer a humble opinion, you did not turn

Lillian Gish into Hester Prynne; you turned Hester Prynne into something—well—something more exquisite.”

“Some of the critics didn’t think so; they said——”

I know the things they said. I have those scrap-books, where you carefully preserved all the worst ones. A critic—a young critic—does not think he is doing his duty unless he puts a little sting into what he writes. The cup he offers must have its drop of hemlock, even when he proffers it on bended knee.”

“*La Bohême*” and “*The Scarlet Letter*” were popular abroad. From Europe, from the farthest East, the letters came. Oriental young men, in exquisite calligraphy and quaint phrase, told her how she was adored, begged for a photograph, a written line. Some suggested pictures they hoped she would do—“*Joan of Arc*” among them.



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## VII

### "THE FIRST LADY OF THE SCREEN"

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DURING Lillian's absence in England, a scenario for a new picture had been prepared for her, based on the song of "Annie Laurie," believed to have a wide human appeal. All the sets were ready, the costumes had only to be fitted. The day of her arrival, Lillian went to the studio, and next day began on the scenes. Lillian and Miss Moir agree that it was a fearfully hot summer, and that the velvet costumes for Annie weighed fifteen pounds each. Lillian did not care much for the story, and cared for it a good deal less when she learned that Bonnie Annie Laurie, for whom someone had been ready to lie down and die, had, in her later years, turned into an old gossip. Of course, in the picture, her lover is a member of another clan, and there is the usual treachery, with a great deal of confused fighting, and struggling through artificial snow which, in that deadly heat, just about blistered your fingers when you touched it. But Lillian was faithful, and did her sweltering best.

One Sunday, Miss Moir, thinking how much it would be appreciated by the company, "on location," drove out there with several gallons of ice-cream. Unfortunately, that day, rehearsal broke up early. She met Lillian on the road, but two girls couldn't eat all those gallons of cream, and for some reason the rest of the company failed to materialize. They tried to give the surplus away, to passersby, but when several had haughtily refused, they dropped the rest into a ditch.

"Annie Laurie," first given at the Embassy Theatre, New York, May 10, 1927, appears to have been well received. As usual, the notices spoke of Lillian as "lovely," and "winning," and "charming," but they lacked the enthusiasm of those written of Hester and Mimi, and they were doubtful of the picture itself.

The reason is clear enough: the tame, or partially tame, Scot of today, has commendable points; he knows about engines, and Greek, and often plays a fair game of *gowf*. But the range species of some centuries ago, was a good deal different—an unprepossessing, evil-smelling, hairy type, who had clans and feuds and delighted in running off his enemy's cattle, or cannily luring him into a cave and smoking him to death, or, as in this instance, into a castle, to murder him in cold blood. That earlier Scot was hardly the thing to offer to a delicately-nurtured picture audience. Even Norman Kerry as Ian MacDonald, even Lillian as Annie Laurie, could not make him palatable.

Lillian, however, was riding on the top wave. An English company offered her the lead in "The Constant Nymph"; a great German company offered the part of Juliet: "Cannot tell you how delighted we should be, if the remotest possibility"; de la Falaise offered her the part of Joan of Arc, in a picture for which Pierre Champion, the great French authority on Joan, had prepared the scenario. To the last named, she replied that she had long been considering the part of Joan, and put the matter aside with real regret.

And many wanted to write of her. Whatever she did, or was about to do, was news. A magazine, *Liberty*, sent a gifted young man, Sidney Sutherland, all the way to the

Coast to see her. He had expected to do one, possibly two, articles, but his editors asked for more, and under the general title of "Lillian the Incomparable" continued his chapters—"reels" as he not inaptly termed them—through nine weekly instalments!

On any excuse, and with no excuse at all, other than what it presented, and stood for, periodicals carried her picture. *Vanity Fair* published a full front-page portrait, by Steichen, nominating her "The First Lady of the Screen."

Miss Moir says that she was always being approached by lovesick young men, anxious to find out all they possibly could about the object of their affections.

They wanted to know what she ate, what she read, what she did after studio hours, what she talked about. I did the best I tactfully could to gratify their curiosity, but I well remember the look of pained surprise which came over the face of one admirer when I told him that Lillian took a cold plunge every morning, exercised vigorously and did a really spirited Charleston. I suppose this was all contrary to his idea of what such a fragile, ethereal being should do.

Flowers were always arriving, enough to start a florist's shop. And permanent gifts—anonymous ones, some of them, and of great value: a large, magnificent fire opal set with diamonds; an exquisite point lace shawl, so perfectly suited to her personality that the donor must have had taste as well as an opulent purse.

Photographers were always besieging her to pose for them, and painters. The latter rarely caught her personality. It was such an elusive thing. The quick camera was better at it. Frequently, too, she was caricatured, and

it is only fair to say that most of the caricatures were among the best of the results—strikingly like her: “more like me than I was like myself,” she said.

She shared her success with those less fortunate—gave freely, money, advice to young aspirants, help to sister-players and would-be players—provided jobs for them. One day a girl with a face a good deal like her own, and the fairy name of Una Merkel, came to see her. Screen fans know Una Merkel very well today, but perhaps not many know that she is a poet. One Christmas, in appreciation of what Lillian had done for her, she wrote and had beautifully printed on a card of greeting, some verses, two of which follow:

TO LILLIAN GISH

If I could breathe on canvas white my dreams,  
I'd dip my fancy into tubes which held  
Life's colors—pure, of sheerest loveliness,  
Then—I'd paint—you.

I'd borrow of the Lily its perfume,  
Of day—the misty beauty of its dawn;  
Then of the world I'd take a tear—a smile,  
And I'd have—you.

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## VIII

### "WIND"

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THERE had appeared an anonymous novel (later acknowledged by Dorothy Scarborough), a tale of sickening horror, entitled "Wind." It was the story of a young, refined Southern girl, who goes to Texas in an earlier day; is made desperate by the wind and blowing sand and hard human circumstance; marries a rough cowboy; is violated by a man she had met on the train; murders him and goes mad—a category of black disaster.

It was regarded as fine material for a picture, well-suited to motion photography, because of the wild, tireless wind—perfect symbol of motion, and of the fierce action of the story. A director, Clarence Brown, was highly enthusiastic over the possibilities of "Wind" on the screen, but a favorable decision might have been less quickly reached had all the conditions been foreseen. For making the picture was an experience nearly as desolating as the story. When the studio scenes were finished, a trek of wagons, trucks and motor busses, loaded with paraphernalia, an entire company of actors, a big crew of technical assistants, mechanics, etc., the whole accompanied by eighty mounted cowboys, invaded the blistering Mojave Desert, in the cause of art.

Mr. Brown, after all, was not to direct. He had been sent off to Alaska, on the "Trail of '98," and could not, it seemed, finish it. Victor Seastrom was given the direction of "Wind," and again Lars Hansen was Lillian's leading man. Satisfactory as far as it went. They had waited a long

time on Brown—until they could wait no longer. Spring had come. The Mojave in midsummer was unthinkable. So that big procession one morning got in motion.

It was May, and it was hot. Arriving at Mojave, the men took up quarters in a train that had been shunted onto a disused siding—Lillian, Miss Moir and a few others in a flimsy little hotel, opposite the tracks, where engines switched and banged most of the night long. It was a Harvey hotel, which was the best that could be said for it; the food at least would be good. Cool enough at first, the weather presently became unbearably hot. Whereupon a new difficulty presented itself: Film coating melted from the celluloid. No developing could be done with the thermometer at 120 in the shade. They tried freezing the films, but this made them brittle, like thin glass. Finally, they packed them, frozen, and rushed them by special cars to the Metro laboratories, one hundred and forty miles away, to be carefully thawed out.

And the human misery of it! Miss Moir writes:

Quivering veils of heat lay over the desert, there was no shade anywhere, and a burning wind blew all day long, raising blisters on your face, taking every bit of skin off your lips. I shall never forget the appearance of the crew during that picture. To protect their faces from the sun they all wore a heavy blackish make-up while their cracked and swollen lips were covered with some sort of white stuff. Add to this goggles, and handkerchiefs tied round their necks, and you can imagine that most desperate looking gang to be seen anywhere on that desert. When the studio executives saw the first rushes they were so horrified at Lars Hansen's unromantic appearance that they ordered the whole sequence to be done again and Lars Hansen to appear shaven and clean, as they argued that no girl could possibly entertain romantic thoughts for such a hairy ruffian.



The cowboys added interest and excitement to the adventure. Long, lean blasphemous individuals, reckless of everything, gambling the minute they were not needed for a scene.

To which Lillian adds:

"It was the very worst experience I ever went through. Temperature 120 in the shade. In the sun . . . ? One man burned his hand quite badly opening the door of a motor. We had eight wind machines, and in the studio, to match up with the blowing sand outside (supposed to be blowing in the doors and windows), we used sulphur pots, the smoke giving the effect of sand blowing in. The sand itself was bad enough, but the pots were worse. I was burned all the time, and was in danger of having my eyes put out. The hardships of making 'Way Down East' were nothing to it. My hair was burned and nearly ruined by the sulphur smoke. I could not get it clean for months. Such an experience is not justified by any picture."

Nature seems to have wearied of their evil-smelling feeble devices, and one day gave an example of what she could do herself. Miss Moir, graphically:

A few days before we finished the scenes up there it turned cold. Towards the end of the afternoon work was stopped by a terrific sandstorm. A howling wind, which soon assumed the proportions of a hurricane, tore down from the mountains sending the sand whirling in dense masses before it. The sky was black and everything was obscured by a veil through which we could dimly perceive the figures of the cowboys bent forward on their saddles, horse and rider braced against the oncoming fury, making for camp. There was an extraordinary beauty about the scene, as Lillian and I stood for a moment and watched it before getting into the car, and I could appreciate the feeling in her voice when she said "Oh, how I wish Mr.



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Griffith was here. How he would have loved to photograph that.”

All night long the storm raged while our shaky little hotel quivered to its foundations. As we lay in bed trying vainly to sleep, we could see the flimsy walls of the hotel bending before the onslaught, and in the morning the room was full of sand which had leaked in through every crevice of the ill-built structure.

This was exactly what they had come up there to produce, but apparently they made no use of it. One remembers Griffith waiting for the blizzard in New England, and echoes Lillian's heartfelt utterance. The day had come when Nature's effects were no longer in favor—were even resented, as an imitation; and one who has seen the picture must confess that those eight wind machines were not easily to be outdone.

The most depressing of Lillian's films, "Wind," is one of the best—beautiful in its sheer ferocity. Nemirovitch Dantchenko, distinguished manager, playwright and producer, of the Moscow Art Theatre, being then in Hollywood, after a preview of it, wrote as follows:

I want once more to tell you of my admiration of your genius. In that picture, the power and expressiveness of your portrayal begat real tragedy. A combination of the greatest sincerity, brilliance and unvarying charm, places you in the small circle of the first tragediennes of the world. . . . One feels your great experience and the ripeness of your genius. . . . It is quite possible that I shall write [of it] again to Russia, where you are the object of great interest and admiration by the people.

For some reason, "Wind" was not released until late in the year. When it finally appeared, the time for it was



"WIND"

Letty, burying the man she had killed



brief—the talking picture was ready to invade the land—but that story—a sad one—we shall come to a little later.

Lillian's last silent picture, "The Enemy," a war picture, laid in Vienna—not very startling—closed her two-year contract with the Metro company. She was to have made six pictures, but they were unable to give them to her. Both sides were satisfied, however, and parted on the pleasantest terms. Only too gladly, Lillian would have made another picture, had conditions been otherwise. The company on its part had no word of complaint, even paid her for one day extra time, something over a thousand dollars, a complete surprise, for she had taken no account of that day.

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## IX

### GOOD-BYE, CALIFORNIA

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ON the whole, in spite of "Annie Laurie's" burdensome velvets, in spite of Mojave's sulphur blasts and blistering sands, it had been—or, but for her mother's illness, might have been—a happy as well as a profitable two years. Mimi and Hester Prynne had been worth while. "Wind" had been an artistic triumph.

Miss Moir, very close to Lillian during all this period, has left a series of impressions and incidents not directly connected with her work:

I remember the first time I saw her at the Ambassador Hotel, New York, she struck me as a person of perfect poise and great charm of manner in which there was something almost childishly appealing. In many ways she is a paradox. She gives the impression of helplessness when she is really the most resourceful person I know. You think sometimes that she is weak and easily led, and then you suddenly come up against an inflexible will and an iron determination to do what she has set her mind on doing.

Then another picture comes into my mind as I often saw her at parties, sitting uncomfortably in the quietest corner she could find, talking generally to some elderly person until the time came to go home, where she always went as soon as possible.

Her hands are expressive of her whole personality, delicately modelled, yet with a look of latent strength and capability about them. She uses them beautifully.

She has no fidgety movements. She is one of the few women I know who have learned the art of perfect stillness.

She loves fortune tellers, though she doesn't take them seri-

ously and generally forgets what they have told her, five minutes after leaving them.

Our entire life in California on looking back, seems to have its centre in the room where poor Mrs. Gish sat, patient and speechless, looking forward to the moment when Lillian would get back from the studio. On her Birthday morning her room was so crowded with presents it looked like a giftshop. She was delighted with everything, and seemed to take a turn for the better from that day. Until then she had seemed to be losing interest in life—slipping away from us. Having once aroused her from this lethargy Lillian's whole endeavor was spent on keeping her mother amused. She was constantly coming home with some lovely thing for her—a pretty bed-jacket, a taffeta quilt for her bed, an exquisite set of china for her breakfast tray.

Mr. Mencken came for dinner one Sunday night. I remember we were all a little bit worried about entertaining such a distinguished guest, but we needn't have been because he seemed to enjoy everything with the zest of a schoolboy.

I have somewhat different memories of the night Mr. Hergesheimer came to dine. Dinner was set for 7:30; Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks arrived, but no Mr. Hergesheimer. Half an hour and then three-quarters of an hour went by—still he did not appear. Finally the telephone rang and a desperate voice called over the wire. It was Mr. Hergesheimer: somehow or other he had gone to the house which Lillian had rented the previous year, and had been unable sooner to locate her present abode. He arrived quite out of breath, an hour late, and considerably disturbed.

One of the pleasantest recollections I have of California is the evening Lillian and I went to a "bowl" concert just a week or so before coming East for good. It was a night of brilliant moonlight, unusually warm for that climate and perfect for a concert in the open air. I remember as we drove homeward after it was all over, that we talked of our years together in California, of all the drama and comedy we had shared there, and agreed that it hadn't been such an unpleasant time after all.

Then, presently, they were off for New York; Lillian, her Mother; the nurse, Miss Davies; Miss Moir; John, the poll-parrot, which they had got twelve years before at Denishawn; two dogs; three canary-birds, and a bus-load of hand luggage.

As usual, Lillian had worked up to the last minute, had made one or more scenes of "The Enemy" the morning of her departure. Little she guessed, when she walked out of the studio, that those were the last scenes in silent pictures she would ever make, that all unsuspected, another beautiful craft was about to be relegated to that limbo of outworn things which holds the painted panorama and the wood engraving. During fifteen years, she had been a unique figure in an industry which she had watched grow, almost from infancy, to a mighty maturity, and which was now at the moment of dissolution. That Lillian did not see this is not surprising, but that the great producers, with ears supposedly close to the ground, their research departments always alert, should have taken so little account of the warning voices (literally that), is astonishing.

Of Lillian's pictures, I believe there are three on which her screen fame rests. In many there are distinguished scenes: in "The White Sister," for instance; in "Romola," in "Wind," and in "Way Down East." But of those which were consistently good, I should name, in order, "Broken Blossoms," "La Bohême" and "The Scarlet Letter" as those for which she will be longest remembered: and this because of their exquisite beauty and their suitability to her special gifts.

As to what Lillian did for the picture world, I am



troubled by a lack of knowledge. There are moments when it would seem that very little has been done for it, by anybody. I suspect, however, that she did more than now appears. She had a wide following among the picture players, to whom, through example alone, she must have taught restraint, delicacy—in a word, good manners. In a hundred pages I could not say more, or wish to.

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## X

### REINHARDT

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LILLIAN, at the Drake Hotel, in New York was kept busy declining offers of engagements—ranging from vaudeville through matrimony and pictures to the so-called legitimate stage. Maurice Maeterlinck wrote to a friend:

I should be all the more happy to undertake the scenario you speak of, in that it concerns Lillian Gish, who is the great star of the cinema that, among all, I admire, for no other has so much talent, or is so natural, so sympathetic, so moving.\*

Lillian concluded a contract with the United Artists for three pictures, to be directed by Max Reinhardt, foremost director and producer of Europe. The company had a contract with Reinhardt, and it was on their promise that he should direct her, that Lillian signed with them. Her plan had had its inception a year earlier, she said, during a visit of Reinhardt's to Los Angeles.

"My connection with Reinhardt was this: In 1923-24, I had seen his stage production of 'The Miracle,' with Lady Diana Manners and Rosamond Pinchot. Morris Gest brought it over, and at the time had asked me to play the part of the nun. Reinhardt, who had seen something of mine—I suppose 'The White Sister'—had suggested this. I could not do it because of my contract. I was then on the eve of returning to Italy, to make 'Romola.'

\*"Je serais d'autant plus heureux d'entreprendre le scénario dont vous m'avez parlé, qu'il s'agit de Lillian Gish, qui est la grande vedette du cinéma que j'admire entre toutes, car aucune autre n'a autant de talent, n'est aussi naturelle, aussi sympathique, aussi émouvante."

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“I did not meet Reinhardt until he was in California, with ‘The Miracle.’ With Rudolph Kommer and Karl von Mueller he came out to our Santa Monica house, for luncheon. Before luncheon we went to the studio and ran, I think, ‘Broken Blossoms.’ Then, in the afternoon, ‘La Bohême’ and ‘The Scarlet Letter.’ They seemed to please him. He spoke no English, and I spoke no German, at the time. Kommer served as interpreter. It was then that Reinhardt suggested that we might work together. He had never made a picture, but was eager to try. He had spent thirty-five years in the theatre, and was tired of it. He had theatres in Berlin and Vienna, the finest in Europe.”

From Kansas City, Reinhardt and Kommer telegraphed:

Once more we want to thank you for that most fascinating Sunday you gave us. We greet you as the supreme emotional actress of the screen and hope fervently that the near future will bring us in closer contact on the stage and on the screen. Please do not forget Salzburg when you come to Europe. We shall be waiting for you.

Salzburg was Reinhardt’s home, where in an ancient castle, Leopoldskron, he kept open house, for a horde of congenial guests. Reinhardt and Kommer had spoken of a picture they would prepare when she came to New York. Now, at the Drake Hotel, they started on a story for it. Reinhardt, meantime, had brought over a company and was producing “Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “Danton’s Todt.”

Reinhardt, Lillian said, talked to her about Theresa Neumann, the peasant miracle girl of Konnersreuth, who on every Friday except feast days went through the entire sufferings of Christ, the blood trickling from stigmata on

her forehead, her hands and her feet. Nobody but those who have seen it will believe it, but her case is a very celebrated one, and has been studied by scientists of Germany and Austria, and of other countries. Reinhardt believed that a great miracle picture could be based on the case of Theresa Neumann, and Lillian agreed with him. She would come to Leopoldskron, and would go to see Theresa Neumann for herself. "I must do that, of course," she said, "and familiarize myself with the lives of the peasantry of which she was one."

"In April, Mother, Miss Davies and I sailed for Hamburg. We arrived at Cuxhaven early one morning. Mother had to be carried to the train and to a private car. Reinhardt was already over there. His secretary met us, and Mr. Melnitz, head of the United Artists in Germany.

"At Hamburg, we put Mother to bed for two hours. She had been up since half-past four. Nurse and I had not slept all night. We took train for Berlin, arriving at six in the evening. I had not realized that Germany is like America in the matter of news. I supposed we would go in quietly. Instead, we found the station literally jammed with people, all trying to get around us. It was terribly hard on poor Mother."

There were a dozen or two camera-men, and when they found they couldn't all take pictures of Lillian, they got around Mrs. Gish, who was in a big chair carried with poles. She could not tell them that she did not want her picture taken, and began to cry. When at last they got into an automobile, all the camera-men and reporters jumped into other cars and came racing behind, taking pictures all the way to the hotel. During the next few days, Lillian was too nervous to give more than a few

interviews. Reinhardt comforted her by saying that no artist ever had come into Germany with such a reception from the press.

At Berlin Lillian consulted Professor Vogt, head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, supposed to know more than anyone else about cases like her mother's. Professor Vogt said he could not do very much for Mrs. Gish, but warned Lillian that she herself was likely to be headed in the same direction. He advised that her mother be taken to Doctor Sinn's Sanatorium at Neubabelsburg, advice promptly followed. Mrs. Gish remained there a year.

To Lillian, in Berlin, came this letter:

O smallest blonde:

You must not think of any other place but Leopoldskron! Max Reinhardt and we all would think that we had failed completely to please you. Besides, the hotels are now terribly overcrowded and you would be perfectly miserable there. So please, do overcome any inhibitions, and come to Leopoldskron! I am expecting your wire about train and hour.

We are just having Anthony Asquith and Elizabeth Bibesco here. This means that the whole castle is one flaming song *in gloriam Lilliane Gish*. . . .

I do hope that Professor Vogt will entirely satisfy the expectations of your poor mother. My sincerest wishes and regards to her . . . Schloss Kommer and Salzburg are sending you loving greetings. Au revoir! Yours ever,

R. K. Kommer

"I went to Salzburg," Lillian said, "to Leopoldskron. Reinhardt and his secretary, Miss Adler, were on the train, and Kommer was at the station to meet us. Leopoldskron is a huge place, a little way out of Salzburg, built hundreds of years ago. I don't know how many

rooms it has, but only candles were used to light them. I was much impressed when we drove up to it, and when we got inside. There were ever so many guests, distinguished persons from everywhere. It is like a great hotel, and has three dining-rooms. Among the guests, was the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who had come to work on the story we had planned for our picture. Kommer got me a maid, Josephine, whom I afterwards brought to America.

"We worked three weeks on our story, that time; then I went to Paris for a fortnight, then to Mother at Neubabelsburg. Later I went to Leopoldskron for another three weeks, to meet Mr. Joe Schenck, who had come over to hear the story. Frances Marion was in Salzburg by that time. She said we had a wonderful theme. Schenck also liked it—said we should get back to Hollywood as quickly as possible, and make it. Possibly he suspected that something was likely to happen—something like an earthquake in the picture world. Off there in that corner of Austria, we never dreamed of it.

"I was anxious to see something of Austrian peasant life at close range. At Leopoldskron was the artist Feistauer. He himself was a peasant, and he asked me to pose for him. So we made a bargain. I agreed that if he and his wife would go with me, I would get a car, pay the expenses of the trip and he could take us to the part of the country he knew. If he would do this, I would pose for him. He was quite willing, and we arranged our party. There were five of us besides the chauffeur: Feistauer and his wife; von Hofmannsthal's son Raymond; myself, and Josephine, my maid.

"It was a wonderful experience. I saw peasant life as



I should never have seen it otherwise. We would stay a day and a night in a peasant house—huge houses they had, like those in the Schwartzwald, with their animals in one part of it. Their food was a coarse bread, milk and potatoes, placed on a kind of framework in the middle of the table. I was so impressed with it all—different from anything I had ever seen:—the great room below, the small chambers above. The combined living-room and kitchen was sometimes very beautiful. The great cooking-stoves so unlike any I had known. Beautiful, too, because primitive.

“We came one day to a house where a man walked out to meet us, carrying a child in his arms, leading another. I thought he had the most wonderful face I had ever seen, a perfect Christ. He was followed by some geese, two dogs and a baby lamb. He came up and greeted us with the word they use with strangers, ‘Christgott,’ and led us to the house. He apparently knew Feistauer, but his greeting to him was the same as to us. We sat down for a little; then he took Raymond and myself through the house. We were there perhaps an hour in all. When he had gone I said to Feistauer: ‘If you should ever wish to paint the Christ, I should think you would use that man. He is nearer my idea of the Christ than anyone I have ever seen.’ Feistauer said: ‘I have done so, often. He is my brother!’ Because Feistauer had given up the land to be a painter in town, he was, in a sense, an outcast, a stranger—no more than any other of our party.

“It was at the end of my second visit to Salzburg that I saw the miracle girl, Theresa Neumann—at Konnersreuth. I was on the way to see Mother again, and stopped off there. She was to be the subject of our picture, and it was very necessary that I see her. No one is allowed to do so



without special permission. I had letters from the Archbishop of Regensburg. Josephine, my maid, went with me.

"I found poor, the very poorest, accommodations in the peasant village where Theresa Neumann lived. She is just a peasant girl herself, the eldest of eleven children, about thirty years old when I was there. Hundreds try to see her, but only members of the clergy, or those with special permits, can get near her on the days of the miracle. There is no charge of any sort, and her people are very poor, helped a little by the Church.

"It is the most amazing sight in the world. Her ecstasy begins about one o'clock Friday morning, and lasts until noon. The wounds, which are closed and black between times, open, and blood flows from them—from those on her hands and feet, from the spear-wound in her side, and the thorn-wounds on her forehead. Tears of blood drip from her eyes, run down her cheeks, and stain her white gown. I was within three feet of her, and saw all this. I don't expect anyone to believe these things, but I saw them, exactly as I have said, and if it is trickery, it is beyond anything of the sort I have ever heard of. I asked her to pray for Mother, and I believe she did. Mother got better, so it may have helped.

"The miracle has been accounted for in many ways, both by skeptics and believers. The believer, a priest, who talked about it to me, called her a 'child of grace,' which may be as good an explanation as any, if one knew what it meant. Dozens of books have been written about her. Perhaps she is all mind, but that seems a poor explanation. It is claimed that she has not taken food or drink for a number of years. Incredible, of course, but no more so than the things I *saw*."

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## XI

### THE SHADOW SPEAKS

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LILLIAN left her mother in the sanatorium, where apparently she was improving, and with Josephine, her maid,—booked as a “fellow artist” (she was really that, for she would serve as model for Austrian peasant girls in the picture),—Lillian sailed on the *Île de France*, for New York. Reinhardt presently followed, with the play itself, which von Hofmannsthal had completed. Young von Hofmannsthal came as Reinhardt’s assistant. These two, with Lillian, and Josephine the “fellow artist,” descended upon Hollywood.

Alas, for the beautiful, silent picture play of “The Miracle Girl of Konnersreuth.” They were just a year too late!

For now it was that the long-unexpected-inevitable had happened: All in a brief summer and autumn—in a night, really—a change had come over the flicker of the photographic dream . . . it SPOKE!

The film with a voice—a possibility for twenty years or more—hardly taken seriously except by the inventors—now, all at once, had arrived. Rather doubtfully at first—a crude thing, but of instant popularity. The writer of these pages remembers a fierce summer day in '28, when he slipped into a jammed and darkened house on Broadway, and sat on the floor in a remote corner, fascinated, watching the moving phantoms, silent heretofore, as they shouted wildly at each other in the *mise en scène* of a

haunted house. After that, when he heard friends say: "It is just a novelty—it will not last," he was not convinced. If he knew anything at all, he knew better than that. If they could do so much, they would presently do more. They did. The Warners put out Al Jolson in "The Singing Fool," and the doom of the silent film was not only written, but sounded very loud. The play itself was hardly a classic—it didn't need to be. Jolson's speaking and singing voice was up to microphone requirements—sound and vision were synchronized. The record was miles beyond anything attempted before. The "Talkie" had come!

A huge shudder ran through the ranks of movie actors. Many of them did not even speak English. Many of them did it very badly—provincially, nasally, flatly, indistinctly, or with an impossible accent. Of those who spoke it well enough, not all had voices suited to the microphone—"Mike," as they irreverently named it)—they recorded poorly. Their voices had to be "placed." Voice culture became a new Hollywood industry. Some, even, began learning to sing.

It was just at this point, late in 1928, that Lillian and Reinhardt reached Hollywood. The press heralded their coming, recounted the story of Reinhardt's life, and distinguished work; how now with a new and marvelous story, written by von Hofmannsthal in the great castle of Leopoldskron, for the "first lady of the screen," he was ready to enter and electrify the picture world.

Good publicity, but it fell on deaf ears. Jolson HAD MADE the "Jazz Singer"! Chaos ruled in the studios. A dozen producers who didn't know whether they stood on their heads or their heels, shouted that it was all just a

passing fad, but meantime were knocking together "sound stages" and engaging people who could talk prettily to "Mike," or sing, or do anything that would make a convincing noise.

Of course, everyone still believed in the old silent pictures, but nobody wanted to start one. Those already begun were dropped. Gloria Swanson, at great loss, stopped a half-completed film.

Reinhardt and Lillian were dazed. Joe Schenck, who in Salzburg had bid them hurry home to make their picture, now repudiated it—told them to make a talkie of it. Reinhardt protested, then went into the desert—not to fast and pray, but to do what Schenck demanded.

No use. He had been working for a year on a silent picture. Now to make the shadows speak . . . impossible. Even the desert . . . even fasting and prayer . . . even "The Miracle Girl," could not accomplish it. He lingered through the winter, hoping that those who said the talkie was just a fad were right. Then . . .

Lillian sighed as she remembered these sorrowful things:

"Hollywood, always more or less mad, was really an asylum. Even Mary was doing a talkie, 'Coquette'\*; Chester Morris was doing another 'Alibi.' Nobody was doing our beautiful old silent pictures, any more. Everywhere you heard the hammering of workmen building sound stages. Then—with Spring—Reinhardt returned to his neglected theatres, to his castle at Salzburg. It had been a great loss to him. I was not responsible, for he had

\* Lillian herself was more or less responsible for "Coquette." In a letter of Sept. 17, 1928, Mary wrote her: "I remember, dear, you were the first to tell me to do 'Coquette.' If it turns out well, it will be the second time in my career that you have helped me bridge a difficult place." Lillian's suggestion, however, had been, of course, for a silent picture.

signed his contract with United Artists before I had, but I felt terrible over it. He never blamed me, or was anything but fine about it. I did not see him again until last Summer (1930), when I was in Paris. We spoke of the pity of it all—his coming at the wrong time, when it was too late—too late and too early. Another year, and he might have been in the mood for a talkie. He had really come on a sincere errand. Most of those who come, come just for the money in it. He had come for a finer purpose.”

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## XII

### ON THE FLYING CARPET

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LILLIAN looked out of the window of the den, on the boats passing up and down, perhaps reflecting a little on the uncertainty of human undertakings.

"I have one bright memory of that gloomy Spring," she said presently. "One morning in March, while Reinhardt was in the desert, Douglas Fairbanks called me up, and asked:

"'Are you game to do something?'

"'What is it?' I said.

"'Never mind; are you game to do it?'

"'Are you and Mary going to do it?'

"'We are.'

"'Well, then I will.'

"'All right. We're going on a plane to have a look at the war in Mexico. Will you go?'

"'I should *think* so. When do we start?'

"'Right away, as soon as we can get ready.'

"I went up to Pickfair, to see Mary as to what we were to take. We met at the studio about eleven o'clock, drove to the Glendale Flying Field, and got into what seemed a very big, powerful plane. There were ten of us altogether: Doug and Mary; Doug's brother, Robert, and his wife, Lurie; Mary's niece ('Little Mary'); two cousins, Verna and Sonny; myself, and the pilot and captain. There was plenty of room and we got off without any trouble.

"But it turned out that our motors were not powerful enough. We meant to cross the mountains by the San Ber-



nardino Pass, but when we were over the low first range, we ran into a storm of wind and snow, and our engines would not lift the plane over the Pass. The snow got so thick that we could not see a thing in any direction—just a white, whirling mass. We were likely to run into the mountain-side, any moment. We rolled and billowed around, three times turning back, and trying it again. Then the captain, very white, came and shouted into Doug's ear that it was madness to go on, that we had better turn back and follow down the Coast to Mexico. It was impossible, the captain said, to find the Pass.

"We turned back, and all were relieved. There had been no question as to the danger. Less than a year later, a big plane with a party was lost up there, dashed against the mountain-side.

"The weather was better as soon as we got away from the mountains, and along the Coast was fine. At Agua Caliente, Mexico, we ate dinner and spent the night.

"We telephoned for a larger plane, and a big Wasp came down. All got into it except Robert Fairbanks, who said he knew when he had had enough, and that the day before had satisfied him. We left about eleven o'clock. For some reason, we did not take much along in the way of food, and about three P. M. our crowd began to look rather poorly—hungry and seasick. Even Douglas shushed Mary when she started to tell her troubles. He had a greenish look, and not at all his usual high-hearted manner.

"We got to Phoenix, Arizona, about five, starved, and went to the beautiful hotel. They lodged us all in one bungalow, and immediately we called loudly for tea and sandwiches. We spent the night there, left around nine,



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next morning. We flew to Grand Canyon—not really to the Canyon, but to the nearest flying field, and drove to the Canyon by motor. There we took a long walk along the rim, and looked down on the Canyon in the evening light, one of the strangest and loveliest and most impressive sights in the world—really sublime.

“Next morning, we motored back to the plane and headed Westward. We got hungry, but there seemed no good place to stop for luncheon. All we could see were poor little Mexican or Indian villages, in the desert. Finally, we got to Las Vegas, and after luncheon flew homeward, over the mountains we had been unable to cross when we started, dropping down into the San Fernando Valley at sunset, as on a magical flying carpet. We had had four beautiful days. We did not see much of the war, though at one place in Mexico we saw smoke, and thought we heard the sound of distant firing. Douglas had believed it unwise to go any nearer. We might be taken for spies, and pursued—even brought down. After all, war was not what we really cared to see.”

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### XIII

#### “ONE ROMANTIC NIGHT”

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IT is difficult to realize the size of the catastrophe resulting from the sudden production of talking pictures, even of pictures with “sound effects,” as many of them were, at first. Some of them really talked—better, or worse, than others. No matter; every picture theatre in New York, and most of them on the road, were presently being “wired for sound.” All the millions (possibly billions) of dollars’ worth of silent pictures, shrunk in value at a ghastly rate. The Eastern Hemisphere, the only market for them presently, was comparatively unimportant. Hundreds of pictures were useless; picture players found themselves “out of a job.” Stars began to pale and disappear.

On the other hand, ill as was the wind, it dispensed benefits. Stage players out of employment found market for their trained speech. Their feet warmed the way to Hollywood. A good many were already there. As the months passed, the screen showed more of the old familiar faces. Broadway to the rescue. Even the great succumbed. George Arliss, master of diction, joined the procession, Ruth Chatterton—eventually, Lillian.

Not willingly. She still believed in the silent film. She had objected even to the lip movement, the simulated speech insisted upon by the directors. To her, the perfect picture must be pure pantomime—with music—appropriate music, as in “Broken Blossoms.” It would never be that, now. Beautiful Evelyn Hope was dead. There is no

help for such things. Tears, idle tears. Since the beginning of time, grief has never repaired a single loss. One might as profitably wail over the sunken Atlantis.

She still had her contract with the United Artists, and by its terms must make at least one picture before she could cancel it. She had hoped to get out of it altogether; but while it did not mention talking pictures, she was advised to abide by the terms.

"It would involve me in a suit with the United Artists, and I had had suits enough. As it was, I barely avoided another: The company had agreed to let me do Eugene O'Neill's 'Strange Interlude,' if I could get it for a reasonable sum—I could have it to take the place of the Reinhardt picture. I came East in April (1929), to see Mr. Madden, O'Neill's agent. I could have it for \$75,000. This suited Mr. Joe Schenck. It suited Mr. O'Neill. We had the papers drawn up. I was to sign them that morning, and it was only because I was protected by an angel that I didn't do it. On that very day, a woman brought suit against O'Neill, for plagiarism. Had I signed that contract, I should have been involved in the suit. She was beaten, and had to pay costs, but the damage to O'Neill was more than that, in fees.

"Meantime, Dorothy had gone to Germany and brought Mother to London. Mother was tired of sanatoriums and hotels. She wanted a home, and I decided to have one. I joined them, and Dorothy and I went to Paris, to collect furniture for an apartment. I had most of it made, copies of old French pieces.

"I came home in August, and all through that month looked for a place to live. It was a terrible search in the heat. When I saw this apartment, with its outlook on the

river, its quiet air and sunshine, I knew that it was what we wanted.

"My friend, Mr. Paul Chalfin, kindly looked after the decoration, and I started at once for California, to do the picture we had selected, 'The Swan.' This was during the latter part of September, 1929. The apartment would not be ready before November."

In California, Lillian lived with Madame de Grésac, at Beverly Hills. There was just then a good deal of talk about kidnapping, and she was advised against living alone. Josephine, her Austrian maid, had remained in Los Angeles, but met her at the station, with flowers and tears.

Careful preparation for "The Swan" began. Lillian was admirably suited to the rôle, that of the fair Princess Alexandra, her voice quality and diction needed only slight adjustment. Melville Baker had written the script for "The Swan," adapting it from his translation of the original play by Ferenc Molnar. She thought very well of it, and hoped for the best.

She wrote Reinhardt of her decision, and received a gracious reply. Both artistically and from the business point of view, it ("The Swan") ought to be a success, he said, and added:

In spite of all those rather disagreeable experiences I had to go through in Hollywood, I have kept the time I spent there in most agreeable remembrance. To have been together with you, your undeviable artistic spirit, blossoming there like a rare lonely flower, and the pureness of your conviction, made me happy and will remain for me an unlosable experience for all time to come. . . .

Making a picture now was a different matter from those very recent old days. Then, a set where action was in



*Steichen*

*Courtesy of Vanity Fair*

"THE FIRST LADY OF THE SCREEN"



progress, was about the noisiest place on the lot. Stagehands and various bosses shouting to one another, the director shouting at the players—noise, noise, no end to it. Now, all was silence. Every sound, even the feeblest rustling, was recorded by the microphone. Except for the actors, their laughter, their breathing, the accessory beat of rain, or hail, the stillness was perfect. The sound stage was a padded cell.

"With the preparation and all," Lillian said, "I worked about three months on 'One Romantic Night,' as they called the picture later. Mary Pickford has a bungalow on the lot, and lent it to me. I used it as a dressing-room, sometimes I slept there, when I had to be on the lot very early. I had Georgie, my dog, and Josephine. It would have been well enough, but they were building sound-stages all about, which made a great deal of noise, all night long. It was a complete little house. Josephine cooked for me when we stayed there.

"I arrived in New York Christmas morning, with a wild turkey, which I got in Arizona. It had been brought to the train by some friends of a little girl who had done my hair out there. They had often sent turkeys to me, to California. It was all dressed, and all the way across the continent, cooks on the diners kept it in their refrigerators. They were very much interested.

"We had dinner in our new apartment, our first real home. Mother was delighted with it, and has seemed better and more contented ever since. Her pleasure in it makes us all so happy."

"One Romantic Night" was a photographically beautiful picture, with a distinguished cast. Lillian, as Princess Alexandra; Rod La Roque, as the Prince (sent, against his



will, to woo her) ; Marie Dressler, as her designing mother ; Conrad Nagel, as a tutor, in love with Alexandra ; O. P. Heggie—altogether a fine company.

Yet it has been called a poor picture, and Lillian today is not proud of her part in it. It was by no means a failure. Never had she looked more lovely. No longer a victim of tyranny, brutality and betrayal, but a Princess, as rare as any out of a fairy tale, with a palace and a rose garden and suitors, with a lilting, perfectly-timed voice, Lillian appeared to have come into her own. Her acting and beauty furnished no surprise, but her voice and laugh did ; she had been silent, and sad, so many years. The audience followed her through a presentation, in itself seldom more than mildly exciting, and not always that. The tutor's astronomy at times wearied, not only the Prince, but, unhappily, the audience. Marie Dressler's broad comedy was highly amusing, but there were moments when one got the impression that the play was not only very light comedy, as apparently it was meant to be, but a good farce gone wrong.

Only, that fairy princess in the rose garden—on a terrace under the stars, or leaning from a balcony to her Prince, was not quite farce material. And the ending helped: the Prince and Princess, in a properly ordered elopement, in quite a royal car, swinging under the castle walls, out of the picture, into the night, to the notes of a marvelously musical klaxon, added a touch that brought the story back to the realm of pure romance, leaving a lovely impression.

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## PART FOUR

### I

#### "UNCLE VANYA"

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It was at the end of May, 1930, at the Rivoli Theatre, New York City, that Lillian was presented in her first, probably her only, talking picture. For during those months since she had finished it, something had happened—something of epochal proportions: she had *returned to the stage!* A block down Broadway, in 48th Street, at the Cort Theatre, since April 15, she had been appearing six nights and two afternoons a week, as Helena, in Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya."

It had all come about naturally enough. When it became known that Lillian Gish was closing her contract with the United Artists, proposals arrived plentifully. The distinguished Russian manager, director, author, Dantchenko, wrote that he had begun a story with her especially in mind; Basil Rathbone sent a manuscript and wrote: "I need not say how happy I should be to do a play with you, a privilege denied me even in my very own play, 'The Swan.'" A cable from Germany stated that a motion picture company had been formed of those who believed in Reinhardt, and that Jannings and all the best of Germany's artists had signed; that the first picture was to be "La Vie Parisienne," by Offenbach—three versions to be made, French, English and German, Lillian to have the position of production manager.

But then came an opportunity such as she had hoped for: One day, George Jean Nathan spoke to her of the actress Ruth Gordon, of how much Lillian would like her.

"Couldn't you arrange a meeting?" she asked.

He could, and did. He asked them both to tea, at the Colony Restaurant.

Lillian was not disappointed in Ruth Gordon. They had one love in common: France. They talked a great deal about that pleasant land, its beauties, its castles, its wines—especially its wines—one of which in particular, they both loved, Clos Veugeot. Ruth Gordon said:

"And I know a man who has the same taste: Jed Harris, the theatrical producer."

Someone proposed: "We must try to get a bottle. The first one of us who finds it, to give a dinner, and invite Mr. Harris."

Said Lillian, remembering:

"But of course no one could get a bottle of Clos Veugeot, any more. One day, Ruth telephoned that she had a bottle of Rhine wine, and that Mr. Harris loved that, too. So we had a small dinner in her apartment, with Rhine wine and strawberry ice-cream. For the first time, I heard Jed Harris talk. I thought I had never heard anyone like him. It seemed to me that he knew the theatre as no one I had ever met. Later, when I went with Ruth to get my hat, I said: 'Ruth, he's wonderful! I'd work for such a man for nothing.' Ruth agreed. She had worked for him in 'Serena Blandish,' and told me how fine he had been.

"A few weeks later, George Nathan called up to say that Jed Harris had a part for me: 'That's splendid,' I said, 'but do you think I could do it?'

"'Of course. It's Helena, in Chekhov's 'Uncle Vanya.'"

"I said I would read it over at once, and see if I could

do it. I adored Chekhov, and had a volume of his plays, but it didn't contain 'Vanya.' I was very excited. For ten years—from the time of working with Victor Maurel, I had hoped to get back to the stage."

She ran out to a bookshop, and presently was back, deep in the play. She thought Helena a hard part—wondered if she could do it. Her stage work lay far behind her—really counted for little, though for more, perhaps, than she realized.

This was at the end of February, or early in March. Almost immediately, they went into rehearsal. Jed Harris had selected a well-nigh perfect cast. With Walter Connolly in the title rôle, the tired, tearful, disillusioned Vanya; with Osgood Perkins, as Astroff, the hard-riding, hard-drinking, disillusioned doctor; with Eugene Powers, as Serebrakoff, the ailing, fat-headed, city professor; with Lillian, as Helena, his young, beautiful, disillusioned wife; with Joanna Roos, as Sonia, his unhappy, love-lorn daughter; with Kate Mayhew, as Nurse Marina; with Isabel Irving, Eduardo Ciannelli, and Harold Johnsrud—one must travel far to find a group of players better suited to a Chekhov play, or one more congenial to work with. Ruth Gordon was not in the cast, but she came to Lillian's apartment and worked with her. So did Mr. Harris. They believed in her, and encouraged her to believe in herself.

Going back to the stage had its difficulties. For one thing, it had been seventeen years since she had appeared before an audience, and then had never played a leading part. The audience did not matter so much—she had never been audience conscious. But the rehearsing. In the pictures, the scene was shot, the film developed, and put on the screen for judgment, all within a brief time. If unsat-

isfactory, it could be made over, and over again. Furthermore, it could be "edited." Now, it was all quite different. You could not see how well, or how badly, you had done a thing; you only knew what the director told you.

She had moments of misgiving. Perhaps it would have been better, certainly safer, to remain in the pictures—even the talking pictures that had offended her as incongruous. They were new, crude—Arliss in his "Disraeli" had taken a long step towards something that, in the end, might mean, if not perfection, at least something as near it as the silent film had reached. Oh, well . . .

It was in New Haven, on the evening of April 6 (1930), that the curtain went up on Lillian's first night in "Uncle Vanya." She was nervous, after all. The moment came when Helena enters, merely to drift voicelessly across the stage. There was a burst of applause from the audience—she was not prepared for that, and was almost as frightened as on that long-ago night of the explosion at Risingsun. She quickened her step, quickened it still more—was almost running, at the exit. Jed Harris still gives amusing imitations of this first entrance across the threshold of her new-old career.

Never mind—it was a success. The leading New Haven paper, which never before had given an editorial to a theatrical performance, gave one next morning, to "Vanya." Professor William Lyon Phelps invited her to luncheon, and was full of enthusiasm. He had seen nothing, he declared, since Mary Anderson, to impress him so much as Lillian's Helena. He wrote a letter to the "People's Forum," calling the public's attention to the play.

All very gratifying: To Lillian, however, one of the

most satisfactory features of her new venture was the absence of the money element—always, after the Griffith days, a foremost consideration. The word "salary" had never been mentioned between her and Mr. Harris. She did not even know what she was to have until she got her envelope at the end of the week.

It was a gray afternoon, in the little den which has become so much a part of our story, that Lillian recounted these things. She owed a heavy debt to Ruth Gordon, she insisted, and thought of Helena as "Ruth's child."

And just here came one of those coincidences which are always being popped into plays and stories. In another room, the telephone rang. A maid appeared at the door.

"Will you speak to Miss Gordon?" she said.



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## II

### HELENA IN NEW YORK

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THE New Haven Register, after commenting on the "superb piece of staging done by Jed Harris, and the quite indescribable beauty and magic of Lillian Gish's performance as Helena," spoke of "Uncle Vanya" as "surely one of the few really great plays in existence . . . a richly polyphonic drama, in which one watches the drift and flow of human life as one listens to the different voices in a Bach fugue."

True enough, though "Uncle Vanya" is hardly a play at all, but a succession of incidents with no more plot than a picture, which is precisely what it is—a tapestry of exquisite workmanship, a cartoon of human futility—in this case, on a Russian farm.

Mark Twain once wrote:

"God, who could have made every one of His children happy . . . yet never made a single happy one."

Chekhov might have taken that as a text for any of his plays. In "Vanya," no one of the characters is even passably happy, except Marina, the nurse, and Marina's happiness lies in strong tea and hope in the hereafter. All the rest are actively *unhappy*, especially Vanya himself, who is hopelessly in love with Helena, wife of a querulous egotist twice her age—Helena being a little in love with "the Doctor," who is drinking too much, himself heedless of the love of Sonia, who is too good for him, and breaking her heart for him, and is about the unhappiest of all. The late R. K. Munkittrick, of Puck, had a poem beginning:



"All the house is full of sorrow, all the house is full of gloom"; the rest of it will not bear quotation, but in its entirety, it would make a typical Chekhovian chant. Chekhov's houses all were full of sorrow—the pathetic gloom of thwarted human ambitions and desires, of blasted human ideals. Like any of us who happens to think about it, Chekhov did not at all know whether life was a tragedy or a comedy, so he called his plays comedies, and laughed them off on us, letting the tragedy take care of itself, and sink in, and add itself to our own, to make certain that we had our share. And in doing this, he created pictures of which, as the Register remarked, "one is forever thinking: 'These things cannot have been written, they must have been lived.'" With the possible exception of "The Cherry Orchard," "Uncle Vanya" is, I should think, the choicest of Chekhov's tapestries, and the part of Helena, the subtlest example of his artistry.

Certainly, no rôle could have been better suited to Lillian. Helena's beauty, her elusive, eerie personality, her mild, impersonal attitude toward much of what went on about her—it was as if the part had been created for her, or she for the part. It is the advent of Helena, and her gouty, insufferable husband, Serabrakoff, that is the catastrophe of the play—a calamity, in Astroff's phrase, as definite as the ruin wrought by a herd of elephants—and misses being complete only because Vanya's attempt to shoot Serabrakoff hurries them away. There is no special reason why sympathy should be with Helena, except that she is beautiful, and indifferent, and only passively to blame for the trouble she causes, and for the fact that she is bound for life to the bewhiskered Serabrakoff. Perhaps that is enough; perhaps the fact that Lillian played the part had

something to do with it. The scene between the two, which opens the second act, is one of the high spots in the play. The contrast between Lillian in a canary-colored dressing-gown, her splendid hair loose, and her trumpety husband, reveals an entire epic, as tragical as any in the human story; and wherever the blame may lie interests the audience not at all, the chief desire being that the whining old human disaster may pass away as promptly as possible—overnight—leaving the lovely Helena and the doctor, or somebody, to live happy ever after.

It was at the Cort Theatre, on the evening of April 15, that "Uncle Vanya" opened in New York City.

It was the event of the Spring season. A first-night audience in New York is a different matter from one in New Haven. New Haven being a university town, a Chekhov first-night audience would be largely intellectual, with a good sprinkling of picture fans who had "adored Lillian on the screen." In New York, there would be all the typical first-nighters, who get a thrill out of any first night, and especially where it is the first appearance of a comely lady, famous in a different, even if kindred, field. Also, there would be the professionals of stage and screen, each with a very special interest; and all the Chekhovians, some of them doubtful and critical, resolved not to be carried off their feet by any trick of beauty and spotlight, but to stand firm for art only; after these, an army of fans, who all the years had longed to see Lillian perform in the flesh, and, of course, there would be intellectuals, too—and critics—on the whole, I submit, except for the fans, a rather hard-boiled audience, one calculated to put fear into the troubled heart. . . .

But then the curtain went up . . . on a Russian garden scene, and presently, across the stage, floated a vision of loveliness, and all the fans broke loose. And all the Chekhovians, and first-nighters, and professionals, and critics of high and low degree, forgot they were hard-boiled, and broke loose, too, and pounded their hands together long after the vision had passed, as if they hoped it might return, if only to bow.

The *Times* next morning spoke of "the storminess of the greeting at her entrance," and Charles Darnton, in his afternoon column, had this to say of it, and of the play as a whole:

The applause that greeted her at her appearance not only followed her every step of the way but into the wings. Even then it kept up warmly, strongly, insistently. For a moment I was seized with the sickening fear she might pop into view again, like a grand opera singer after an aria, to bow to the tribute. Evidently, the audience expected no less of her. But it might just as well have expected to call back the Ghost in "Hamlet."

The event had its peculiar phase. Walter Connolly was playing the principal character, and playing it finely, whereas Lillian Gish was appearing in a minor rôle, or what would have been a minor rôle in the hands of an ordinary actress. Yet throughout the whole performance interest centered in Miss Gish.

This is said with every consideration for Mr. Connolly. He could not help himself. He was as powerless, and blameless, in the matter as though he had been playing with Duse. But I couldn't help wondering how he felt about it. Not that I suspected him of professional jealousy. It was just that the gods, or Jed Harris, had set down an artist touched by genius, and there was nothing to be done about it. When Miss Gish again appeared, this time to stay and let us hear as well as see her,

when the presence of her filled the stage like light flooding through a window into a room, she was so luminous that the others, including Mr. Connolly, faded into the background. Never before had I seen quite the same thing done in quite the same way.

Certainly, she is not a pushing person. Instead of crowding into the limelight, she seems always to be withdrawing from it. Yet wherever she goes her own radiance follows her and lights her up. Try as you may, you cannot get her out of your eye. Just what this rare thing is I hesitate to say. But a first-nighter did say to me, "She is sublime."

Whatever it may be, it is there in the eyes, the face, the hair, the voice, the form of Lillian Gish.

True enough, but it was a qualification that in future would make it difficult for her to get a part in any play having more than one major rôle.

Mr. Darnton says that he was assured by Mr. Harris that bringing Lillian Gish back to the stage was the finest thing he had been able to do in the theatre, adding: "I am convinced that her performance is one of the most magnificent things I have ever seen."

If there was any dissenting voice as to Lillian's triumph, I have been unable to discover it. But I think there was none. She had everything demanded by the part: the personality, the subtle understanding, the years of training which had equipped her for its perfect interpretation. Percy Hammond, of the *Herald Tribune*, wrote:

"In future when I am told that association with the films is a destructive influence, I shall cite Miss Gish's appearance in 'Uncle Vanya' to prove the contention wrong."

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### III

#### "THE PENALTY OF GREATNESS"

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WE have reached the point in this narrative where the writer's personal association with Miss Gish began. Though long an ardent admirer of her work on the screen I had never seen her, never made any attempt to do so. Once, from France I had written urging her to make a picture of Joan of Arc. I know now that this was an old story to her; many had offered the same suggestion—the idea had been one of her own dreams. Engagements, one thing after another, had always interfered. I treasured the two friendly letters she wrote me about it, but the matter had gone no further. Now, three years later, back in America, the papers told me that Lillian Gish was appearing in person and in picture, in Broadway productions. "Vanya" was playing to capacity, and I do not like buying seats in advance—something is so liable to happen.

Then, one June day, I found myself on Broadway in front of the Rivoli, facing the announcement: LILLIAN GISH IN ONE ROMANTIC NIGHT. I learned that it was continuous, and that there were seats. A very little later, in the cool dimness, I sat watching Alexandra and Prince Albert and the others, and for the first time was hearing Lillian speak.

I thought her more pleasing than ever, and her clear, perfectly enunciated speech was a revelation. I had feared that it might be too loud, too low, provincial—in some way disappointing. It was none of these things; it was pure and sweet, and particularly intelligible; the micro-

phone had recorded every syllable. I sat twice through the picture, suffering through several program features until it came again.

Once more outside, I was sorry I had not remained longer, for the sun was a hot glare. Sitting in Fairyland with Lillian was much more to my taste. I drifted down Broadway, and by chance (apparently), turned into 48th Street.

All at once I stopped: From a large frame on an easel, several Lillians looked out at me. A moment later, I realized that it was Wednesday, for a card at the top plainly stated *MATINÉE TO-DAY*. I was at the entrance to the Cort Theatre. Some people were going in. I wondered if I could get a seat. Midweek, mid-June, and a hot day—I would try.

A very little later, from a fairly good, even if fairly warm, angle, I watched the curtain go up on a Russian garden, where Kate Mayhew was pouring tea and Osgood Perkins, in semi-Russian dress—that is to say, tall boots—was marching up and down.

“Take a little tea, my son.”

And so the action starts, and presently Walter Connolly comes yawning in, the weariest, most lethargic, ill-kempt man the stage has shown this season. What a contrast it all is to the smart *soigné* picture around the corner! Voices outside, and Gene Powers, wearing long whiskers, enters. . . . Then—a beam of pure light, a radiance—floats, glides, drifts across the stage, to a long, and prolonged, salvo of applause . . . and then . . . it is not Kate Mayhew and Perkins any more, or Walter Connolly and sweet Joanna Roos, but Marina and Astroff and Uncle Vanya and Sonia, figures in a sad, amusing dream



—a dream that is real—truth reflected as in a looking-glass, and one no longer minds the heat, or thinks of it, or of anything except the figures that drift in and out, and carry on the dream . . . especially the one figure, embodiment of the Chekhov spirit—that luminous being around which all the others revolve and bruise their wings. The lines of Astrov: "What does she think . . . who is she . . . what is inside her small blonde head? She drifts about here, mysterious, fascinating us. . . . She is like a firefly, that arrests our attention, but gives no warmth, nothing. . . ." And by and by . . . hours, days, maybe—time no longer counts—the futile human dream draws to its futile human ending, and Sonia's sweet voice is saying—to Uncle Vanya, bowed and heartbroken, like herself:

"You have never known what happiness was . . . but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait. We shall rest. Beyond the grave we shall say that we have suffered and wept, and God will have pity on us. And we shall be happy. . . . The wheat fields will be there, and the blue cornflowers . . . and the woods in Spring." And to the low music of Telegin's guitar, she adds: "And those who in this existence did not love us . . . they'll love us . . . they'll want us . . . we shall rest."

The crowd flows out into the June sunshine, the dream with it . . . and all the way home. Poor Uncle Vanya and Sonia . . . one would like to comfort them . . . and, yes, poor Helena . . . !

This was on Wednesday, as I have said. I think it was on Sunday that I sent a note to Miss Gish, proposing to write of her. I had given up such work as too arduous, but it seemed to me that this might be a happy thing to do



—the story of one who had begun humbly, and walked in beauty and humility to achievement, making the world better and lovelier for her coming.

I suppose it was a week later that I received a characteristically simple reply. She expressed willingness to cooperate in the proposed work, modestly adding: “—if I really deserve it. Whatever I could do in the way of help, I should do most conscientiously.”

One could rely upon that. Whatever she did was done in that way. She was on the eve of sailing for France, to visit Eugene O’Neill and his wife. She would return the last of August; then we could begin.

She returned as planned, but it was not until September 11, at her town home, Beekman Terrace, at the extreme end of 51st Street, New York City, that we had our first meeting. Arriving, I was shown into the living-room, a handsome apartment, one end lined with books. A few moments early, I stood looking out at the striking East River view, when she entered.

I had, of course, expected to see a beautiful woman—the woman I had known in the pictures, and on the stage. Yet when she appeared in the room—a slender figure, simply gowned in black, simply coiffed, without make-up—and stood in the drench of light reflected from the river, I confess I caught my breath a little.

I could not understand it. The actress in her home is so often disappointing. Her beauty is the beauty of her rôle—of her lines, her make-up, of the lights—she lays it aside with her part—leaves it in the dressing-room.

Yet it was all simple enough, later: Lillian Gish had

never played the part of a character as lovely as herself . . . as her own spirit.

She led the way to the little room overlooking the river, the den with which we have become familiar—also a place of books. No word of an agreement, much less of a contract, was mentioned between us. In my letter I had suggested that the work be done without the idea of gain. If profit accrued it could be shared. I think neither of us remembered this—then, or afterwards.

I thought the speaking quality of her voice even more musical than when I had heard it in the play and the picture. When I mentioned this, she spoke of the training she had received from Maurel. What I found still more notable was her refinement of diction. Of Middle-West birth and early association, it seemed to me remarkable that she had been able to eliminate practically every trace of sectional usage—no easy matter, once it is ingrained. I noticed that she pronounced "been" rather in the English way, though not conspicuously so. It seemed to me that this woman, whose childhood and girlhood had largely been spent amid surroundings where purity of diction was indifferently regarded, spoke about the most satisfactory English I had ever heard.

I mentioned "Vanya"—her utter identification with the part of Helena; and I asked:

"When one has played many parts, is one ever uncertain as to one's own personality?"

"N-no. The actor has a picture in his mind that he hopes to paint on the screen or present to the audience. I think he does not confuse it with his own personality. Of course, I speak only for myself." And a little later: "I have always honestly tried to reach a high spot—perfec-

tion. Sometimes I seem—almost—to reach it. But then it was never a personal thing—a mood—a moment in the play. . . . Acting in itself is not an art—it is merely repeating lines and gestures, more or less in the manner of the director. But to give these things a special quality—to make them produce a particular mood in the mind of the hearer—to stir something deep down in the heart of the audience—something not measurable by any physical law—something fourth-dimensional—that is art, and may become a very great and sublime one.”

I think it was not altogether what she was saying; I think it was as much her manner, her look . . . her voice; but as I listened, the feeling grew upon me that she was not quite of the familiar world . . . I saw what Cabell had meant, and Hergesheimer.

“With your voice,” I said, “now that the pictures speak——”

Gently she dissented.

“I do not care for the talking pictures. They seem to me incongruous. Even the lip movements, to give the effect of speech, seemed to me all wrong. The silent film at its best was a beautiful thing, and lovely effects could be produced with it. To make the pictures speak seems to me a mistake. Oh, I’m sorry I made the ‘Romantic Night.’

“Charlie Chaplin’s picture,” she went on—“I want it to be a success. He is one of the few who can do what he likes. Mary can do that, too, and Douglas. None of the rest of us. Yes, the people want the talking pictures now, but maybe there will be a change. There should be music, of course. The pictures need music.

“Griffith, in his way, is an artist—too much of an artist ever to be rich. He has shown the others the way to for-

tune—he has not travelled it himself. Nothing satisfied him but the best—completeness. He did not regard cost. Sometimes in the cause of completeness, he overdid. In 'Intolerance,' for example.

"Yes, I have written, from time to time, about the pictures. Not long ago I did an article for Oliver Sayler's book, 'Revolt in the Arts,' and I did one on 'Motion Pictures,' for the Encyclopaedia Britannica. They sent me a check, which I have kept as a souvenir. It was for twenty-one dollars."

She told me some of the happenings of her childhood, half pathetic, amusing things, over which one hardly knew whether to laugh or weep. I was not surprised to find that she had a happy, delicate sense of humor—I have yet to meet anyone worthwhile without it.

She spoke of Mark Twain—of her love for his work, especially "Huckleberry Finn." Later, of "Mickey Mouse": "I could see an entire show of nothing else."

She spoke of her mother, her early hardships, her final break. "All those years of struggle and privation had to be paid for; her capital of health and strength were exhausted, utterly."

Her face, in the fading light, reflected from the river, took on an added unreality.

"This is my favorite part of the day," she said, and it came to me that her remark, and the manner of it, removed her a step farther from her surroundings: that she was, in fact, of Arcady.

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## IV

### WORKING WITH LILLIAN

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"UNCLE VANYA" was to reopen in New York for two weeks at the Booth Theatre, then it was going on the road—to Boston, to Chicago, to Pittsburgh, to Philadelphia. There would be rehearsals, but we should have a good deal of time to work, she said, and would I like to come again tomorrow? It would be nearly four weeks until she left for Boston. We could make a good start.

We worked the next day, and the next, and were to have worked on Sunday, but she was ill when I arrived, and I saw her only briefly, her face flushed with fever, a light attack of "grippe." On that day, I first met that rare woman, her mother, sweet and patient, her face like a miniature, her hands the daintiest in the world. And then, a few days later, that princess of comediennes, light-hearted Dorothy, "a bright flag flying in the breeze," to whom all the days are good days, all music good music, to whom all clouds are lined with silver and spanned with rainbows. The likeness between the sisters, whatever it had been earlier, was hardly more now than a family suggestion that flashed faintly at long intervals. They were, in fact, about as different as it is possible for sisters to be.

Daily we rebuilt the sequence of the years—for Lillian a new occupation which she entered into with zest. As I have told earlier her "den" had a wide window that overlooked the East River—a cozy room, with small low chairs which she loved—a proper setting for her. We almost always worked there. It is associated with these pages.

Her memory of earlier happenings was vague. We relied a good deal upon Dorothy, always in childhood with her mother, who had kept her memories refreshed. To Lillian, those days of wandering had been one like another—little to look forward to, less to look back upon—mere links in a succession of one-night stands. Memory and anticipation do not prosper on that nourishment.

She typified the present. The moment it became the past, it was blurred—sometimes obliterated. Her interest in tomorrow lay chiefly in the fact that directly it was to become today. She examined it, she took it to pieces, in order that she might more substantially rebuild it. Dreams of a radiant, far-off possibility, interested her but meagerly. She had grown up without them, or had grown out of the habit of them and did not miss them any more. I think of her today as a slender figure, walking through a field of ripening grain, that parts before her, and closes behind her as she passes along. Her interest in life lies in the beautiful, exquisite things not far away, and in the welfare of those about her. She moves steadily forward, her feet firmly set. She is without envy, or malice, and totally without curiosity. She is, as I have suggested, apt to forget, but it is never safe to count on her doing so: More than once I have known her to treasure up some casual, inconsidered remark, and recall it one day to my undoing.

She was always in quiet good humor, but almost never gay. The spirit of banter, so riot in Dorothy, was in Lillian altogether lacking. I remember Dorothy saying to me: "Couldn't you find a cigarette holder more complicated than that one?" A remark as foreign to Lillian as toe dancing.



Yet her words not infrequently took a quaint turn. Speaking of the many demands for money that came to her, she once said:

“Three hundred dollars is the amount they usually want to borrow. Sometimes they pay it back—a little of it—when it is three hundred. When it is five hundred, it is a gift—they don’t pay any of it.”

And I recall her saying: “Jazz is America’s challenge to the world.” And again: “The Guild Theatre looks like a library gone wrong.” She certainly made no effort to say such things, and when she did, apparently did not notice them at all, and would not have remembered them a moment afterward. But they were often quite unexpectedly on her tongue.

A mystic herself, she believed in mystical things—in telepathy, in foreknowledge, in visions, in Christian healing. I have already spoken of her visit to the Miracle Girl of Konnersreuth, and there was a time, chiefly on her mother’s account, when she devoted herself to Christian Science,—mind healing, and the like. I was sure she believed in the efficacy of prayer, though perhaps could not give any clear reason for it, beyond the general theory that spiritual and physical harmony might thus be restored. Certainly she was not orthodox, and I was by no means sure that she was not a pagan—a Sun-, a tree-, a flower-worshipper—that would be natural, and proper, for a dryad.

“What is your idea of God?” I asked, one day.

“Force, creative power.” A moment later, she added: “The cloud, the sunlight, that out there, the beggar on the street, myself—all a part of the great Whole—the Truth Absolute.”



"Mathematics," I said, "is the only truth—mathematics in the larger sense, which includes art, music, science——"

But the faith of her childhood was not to be limited to equations. At luncheon, one day, we discussed the beauty of certain phrases, especially those of the King James version of the Bible. She mentioned the comfort and sheer loveliness of the words: "And underneath are the everlasting arms."

I agreed, but pessimistically added:

"The ghastly thing about it is, that they're not there—that this tiny pellet of a world is a part of no protecting consciousness—is drifting unheeded through space."

"But it holds to its orbit—keeps its place in the constellation. Something sustains it."

"A law—gravity, perhaps. Nothing that cares."

"Oh, but there is—the arms are there—I am certain of it."

She was interested in dreams. "I have dreamed things that happened; sometimes soon after," she once said, and added: "I have worked out scenes in my sleep, and half-sleep, when my subconsciousness had full control. And I have many times experienced something that I am sure I had experienced before—possibly in a dream."

"Science has accounted for that, rather prosaically, I believe."

"Science is always accounting for things, and then by and by, it accounts for them again, in another way."

One day, when I was rather down, she said to me:

"I know all about how futile one's work can seem—how inconsequential. So many times last Spring I thought: 'What am I doing this for? Dressing up and pretending to be something I am not—selling myself to these people.

'Vanya' was a beautiful play, and I loved it . . . but to do it publicly. It was just offering oneself to be seen, for money. I never had quite that feeling, doing the pictures. The audience was not present; we were doing the picture primarily for ourselves—at least it seemed so—making a panoramic painting, on a screen."

One day I made use of the word "dooryard." Surprisingly, I found it new to her, but she liked the sound—the picture it conveyed. "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed," I quoted from Whitman. She thought it a beautiful phrase.

In the article she had written for Oliver Sayler's book, I read—as already she had said to me:

I do not believe in the sound film. Something very right, very true, very precious, was cut short on the verge of its ultimate and certain perfection by the intrusion of spoken dialogue and by the consequent throw-back of the cinema toward the theatre. The silent film was slowly coming into its own as an independent art which had nothing to do with the theatre, an art closely allied with music, dependent on music, an art which visualized music, creating independently to a certain point and completed thereafter by music.

But then, one day, she said:

"The silent film came to an end none too soon; it had gone as far as it could go."

I looked out of the window, puzzled. A vessel of considerable size was passing up, toward the Sound. Noticing it, she added:

"I love a ship; any ship; I would go anywhere a ship was going. I never see one that I don't wish to be on it."

"I don't think I quite understand," I said.

“About my loving a ship?”

“No, I understand that—entirely. It is what you say of the pictures . . . I can't quite reconcile it with your article in Saylor's book.”

“But that was theoretical. What I said just now related to existing facts. The silent pictures had gone as far as they could go in the hands they were in . . . too far. In the right hands, they might have saved the world. They spoke a universal language—the only one ever invented. They could have brought all the nations together . . . done away with the narrow patriotism that childishly celebrates its own country above all others, that has for its motto ‘My country, right or wrong,’ a sentiment unworthy of grown-up, enlightened people. Human beings are pretty much alike, the world over. Difference in language is the chief barrier between them. With the interchange of films, which all but the blind could read, I believe these barriers, in time would have disappeared. Now . . .”

“Now . . . ?”

“The barriers are busily being built up again. George Arliss's ‘Disraeli,’ a beautiful talking picture, would be practically wasted in any country but England and America. An operetta has a better chance. There is a German one on 55th Street that you should see—‘Two Hearts in Waltz Time’—clean and wholesome, with lovely music. You come away from it with a kindlier feeling for Germany. Even better were the lovely silent pictures, with such titles as were needed, in the language of each country. I know something of that, from the letters that came to me, from everywhere. Fine, friendly letters. The writers of those letters could not be our enemies.”

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V

“UNCLE VANYA” TAKES THE ROAD

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“UNCLE VANYA” reopened September 22, at the Booth Theatre, with the original company, except for the part of Sonia, which was played by Zita Johann. That Miss Johann is a successful actress has been sufficiently demonstrated. Yet one could hardly fail to resent any change in the perfect “Vanya” cast. It did something to the illusion. The scenes between Helena and Sonia were still lovely, only Sonia wasn’t quite Sonia any more, but just someone playing her part, pretending. Lillian was all that she had been—my knowing her had not made her any less the illusion, Chekhov’s Helena. It was a warm night, but the audience was good—and appreciative.

When I saw her next day, she reproached me for not letting her know I was there. A week later, I went again, and this time sent in a card, specifying my seat. During the next intermission, a boy brought a little note.

“I am playing for you,” she wrote. “I hope you will think I am not doing it too badly.” And her kind heart prompted her to add: “God bless you!”

Then after two weeks, they were off for Boston, where they arrived at perhaps the worst moment in Boston theatrical history. A great military reunion was there—the streets were a bedlam—all day and far into the night. Not many could get to the theatre, the Wilbur, and those who could, were unable to hear the actors for the tumult outside. What an atmosphere for Chekhov. Lillian wrote me:

It was such a nervous night. The theatre seemed like a barn to speak in, and the noises from the sky and the streets made us all wonder if the audience would tell what we were trying to do.

There are 500,000 strangers in Boston, all of them shouting, blowing whistles, shooting, or making some sound to convince the world that they are "happy."

It is almost impossible to walk on the streets and today no motors are allowed within the city limits. Concentration is difficult. Just now, they are shooting beneath my window. Yesterday "Sonia" came over to rehearse our scenes. We found it impossible. Americans are at their very worst in such a mood, it seems to me.

These are the notices that Georgina cut from the papers. If they are bad it is not surprising, as we were far from our best, last night.

She did not read notices of herself, during an engagement; they made her self-conscious, she said.

The Boston notices were by no means "bad." They spoke of the hard conditions under which the play was produced, the paid-for empty seats, the perfect cast selected for Chekhov's picture of human futility. "A delicately beautiful dramatic tapestry," the Globe called it, "its colors subdued and blended, as only master craftsmen can blend. . . . The company is superb, and the acting well-nigh perfect." And the Transcript, with a full-length three-column picture of her, paid a just tribute to the play and its production. Lillian's part it spoke of as "elusive, wraith-like, symbol of the unattainable. At the end, like a spirit of a passing dream, she drifts away, to leave them to their old problems and their solitude."

But for a week, the attendance was very bad. Then the visiting military was gone, and the house filled. It would

have been filled for a month longer, if they could have stayed. But Chicago was waiting.

Lillian was always reading some book on the road. This time she was re-reading "Wuthering Heights."

What a beautiful piece of work is Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights." It sweeps across the page like the winds on the moor that she knew so well. From fury to tenderness, with such understanding; how many lives had she lived before, to know so much!

She firmly believed in mental and spiritual growth through reincarnation. She was convinced that she had lived before—that now and again, she caught glimpses of a former life. Personally, I was by no means sure that mere human beings had known a previous existence, but I was certain that Lillian had. Not a previous existence, but the same existence, of which the present gave hardly more than a glimpse.

Chicago welcomed her with open arms: she had always been a favorite there. She wrote:

"They keep me moving as fast as a machine-gun in this kind, friendly Chicago. But I shall be so happy when I am by the East River, once more, talking in the little den."

As for the papers, they could not say enough good things of "Uncle Vanya," of Lillian, of the entire company. The *Post* gave a column of appreciation. It had a large picture of Lillian, and in part, said of her:

If an embodiment were needed of our Siberian spirit from the steppes, stalking from East to West, we'd say cast Miss Gish for the part—only, make the spirit glide across the stage, as



does Miss Gish at her first entrance. . . . "Uncle Vanya," as presented, may not be Chekhov, but it is superbly Lillian Gish—and this reviewer, for one, prefers Lillian Gish to Chekhov.

The *News* spoke of her initial entrance, "Not only as a perfect entrance for an actress to make out of the half-dream world of filmdom into the world of flesh and blood, but the whole of Chekhov's drama in a fifteen-second gesture."

Twenty-two years before, Lillian had last "played Chicago," in a theatre where one's dressing-room was in a flooded basement, and one had to wear a long skirt and high heels to avoid the Gerry officers. Now, the Gerry officers did not mind any more—the Harris Theatre was beautiful and well-appointed—one's dressing-room had the fittings required by a modern star. And there were flowers in it, and a little heap of notes and cards—invitations, and requests for interviews. There had been no interviews twenty-two years ago, and if the critics noticed her at all, it had been obscurely and briefly, a line in some half-hidden corner. Now, her picture looked out from every dramatic page, while at the Goodman Theatre, in the foyer, along with those of Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, hung the "Romola" portrait, which Nikolai Fechin had painted, the only portrait of a living actress so honored. Lillian had known that following its exhibition in New York, the portrait had been bought for the Chicago Art Institute, but did not know before that it had been hung in the Goodman Theatre. Now, she was obliged to go and stand beside it and be photographed, with a bevy of girls, and the papers published that, too. And here, in one paragraph, we have a romance as complete as any to be found in the story books.



It was on November 3, that "Uncle Vanya" reached Pittsburgh, a damp and heavy season of gloom.

"Someone dropped my heart into the pit of a coal-mine," wrote Lillian. "I want so to find it, so I can dust it off before I reach New York."

To brighten her stay, and to get material for our work, she brought "Aunt Emily" down from Massillon, not very far distant.

Pittsburgh was hardly a "Vanya" city, but the newspapers were kind—to the play and to the company.

Perhaps it was not strange—but only seemed so—that "Uncle Vanya" had its best houses in Newark, which had been substituted for Philadelphia. I am told there are a good many Russians there—it may be that Chekhovians and other cultured ones abound. At all events they did love "Vanya," there, and said so, and I shall always hold them in affection for the sake of Jed Harris and his perfect company, and especially for the sake of Chekhov, whom a good many people regard lightly, or do not regard at all. The in-growing life of a Russian farm-house, the tragedy of a cherry orchard, are meaningless to them, or only amusing. It was amusing to Chekhov, too, who laughed—a little—that he might not weep—too much.

Lillian was at home again during the Newark engagement, going across the river each evening and matinée afternoon, unpretentiously by bus, with tiresome changes. She might have gone as befitted a great star, but she preferred to go modestly, and, as she thought, more suitably.

And then, presently, "Vanya" was being given in New York again, this time briefly, at the Biltmore. I saw it twice, there, and the charm of it did not wane, but grew

upon me exactly as the charm of the play itself, when read quietly on a winter afternoon. It is my conviction that such another company to play "Uncle Vanya" is not likely to be assembled.

The "Vanya" engagement ended at the Biltmore on the evening of November 29, 1930. Following the *matinée*, Lillian had the company to her apartment, for dinner. She was as pleased as a child with the prospect of having them, and the arrangements. A friend had sent in some very good Italian home-made claret, there was a big turkey, and the tables were arranged in a T, in the living-room at Beekman Terrace.

Owing to the evening performance, the guests could not remain more than an hour, but it was an hour to remember. Kate Mayhew beamed on her younger companions. And when, that night, at the theatre, Griffith came behind the scenes and greeted her with a rousing kiss, she declared, later, to Lillian, that it was the happiest day of her life. "Dinner with you, and kissed by Mr. Griffith! What more could anyone ask?"

Lillian had not seen Griffith for some time. It was a surprise, therefore, when he came behind, at the end of the performance. It was something more than eighteen years since the day she had come to find Gladys Smith at the Biograph studio, and had first seen him, a tall man walking up and down, humming "She'll never bring them in."

What a story of endeavor those eighteen years had told. I have given many pages to it, but among the "Vanya" notices I find this unidentified bit which reflects the spirit of it all:

Lillian Gish, who has ever held high the torch of beauty during her entire career as stage and screen star, and with undeviating purpose has been representative of the finest and best traditions of the theater, adds another triumph to her list of admirable achievements. As the ethereal and wistful Helena she is all the author could have hoped for. Something more intangible she gives to the rôle than her delicate loveliness, her undeniable charm and the richness of her experience as a sincere and gifted actress.

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## VI

### RELIVING THE YEARS

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IT became our custom to work two afternoons a week—Tuesdays and Fridays, and on the hour I found her always ready. Whatever engagement she made, she would keep it; whatever promise, even a partial one. I think she was born with that conscience, and the years of rigid picture appointments had kept it in repair. Griffith had said to her: "You, as the star, must never fail to be there. The others will take their cue from you. *You* must be on time." And she always had been on time, and ahead of time. Once, by a lapse of memory on my part, I missed an appointment when we were to see one of the old pictures together. If she had scolded me with censure, I should have felt better—if she had even shown a little irritation, instead of anxiously helping me to find excuses, I could better have borne it. Five minutes later, it had passed from her memory, but it refuses to pass from mine.

We saw a number of the old pictures, that winter, as has appeared in earlier chapters:

Lillian, in "Broken Blossoms," the picture that had made her the "world's darling" and is still today recognized as the highest point touched by the pictures, for beauty and artistic perfection. I insisted on seeing this picture twice, for it seemed to me her masterpiece. From the moment she enters the picture, her whole attitude, her face, her hands, her feet, her bowed shoulders and bent back—every part and feature of her, tell her crushed, stunted, trampled life.

Of course, her wistful beauty added to the pathos of it all, but Lillian without beauty—if one can conceive that possibility—would have achieved a triumph. When she crosses the street, stoops to pick up the tin foil which she gathers to sell, looks into the shop window, touches the flower she wants, one's heart turns fairly sick for the broken child.

She had not wished to play the part, because it was of a child of twelve. "I wanted Griffith to get a girl of that age."

"But a girl of twelve could never have done it."

She did not answer, only mentioned that she had been ill at the time.

"Do you consider it your best picture?"

She hesitated.

"If not, what would be your choice?"

Again she hesitated, then:

"'White Sister,' perhaps."

We saw that, too, and "Romola," and poor little Mimi, and Hester Prynne, made when Lillian had become, beyond all question, "First Lady of the Screen."

It was toward the end of March that we saw the last of her great silent pictures, "Wind." The motion picture had arrived at mechanical perfection when it was made. It was one of the several "swan songs" of that ill-fated year. I thought it a remarkable picture—beautiful in its stark *un*-beauty. It only seemed unfortunate in that it presented the most sordid of human aspects against a background of wind-cursed wastes.

Lillian watched it almost without a word. I think she approved her part in it, and why not? Technically, she was at her best. We drove home rather silently.

"It was the exact opposite of 'Broken Blossoms,'" I ventured to say.

"You mean . . ."

"That *that* was sheer beauty, while this——"

"But this had beauty, too, don't you think?"

"Great beauty. The illusion of blowing sand . . . Letty's cumulative terror of it—those were classic things. But I cannot imagine going through the torture of seeing it again. The ending didn't save it."

"No. I wanted it to end with her complete madness . . . with her rushing out into the wind . . . vanishing in the storm. They wouldn't let me."

"They thought they were giving it a happy ending."

"I suppose so."

We saw one more picture after that, "The Enemy," her last silent film, and our winter was at an end—a winter during which, by a form of "eternal recurrence," exactly symbolic of Ouspensky's "duplicate reincarnations of the past" I had watched her relive the years, change from the young girl who had played Elsie Stoneman to the mature and finished actress of "Wind," of "One Romantic Night," of Chekhov's Helena.

And in watching I seemed to guess something of her secret. Chiefly, as I believe, it lies in the fact that she does not do violence to herself by making herself over into the part she presents. She studies the environment, the period, the hundred contributing details of the situation, then lives her part in the play as she might have lived it in reality. She takes on the psychology of it—what she conceives to be such—and in some subtle fashion, fuses it with her own. Always, it is Lillian who is playing, and always you want it to be Lillian, just as all those people she has

played—Hester Prynne, Mimi, the White Sister, poor little Lucy Burrows, and Helena—would wish to be Lillian, if they could see her in their parts. And the nearer they could be like her, the better White Sister and Hester Prynne and Helena and the rest, they would make. I am not saying that hers is the best dramatic method—my equipment does not warrant that positive statement—I am only saying that the effect she gives us is not of acting, but of life itself.

Sometimes I feel that I have dwelt overmuch on the subject of Lillian's beauty; again, I feel that I have said very little. It is such a tremendous thing when considered in its relation to her material being—such a baffling thing. She is not richly proportioned. In height five feet four and one half inches, her weight is one hundred and ten pounds. True, her slender feet are small, her limbs shapely; but her arms are full long, her expressive hands rather large, her shoulders narrow, her bust that of a young girl. It is strange, but these very defects—defects in another—add to the charm that surrounds her like an aureola. Her face—I cannot write about her face—I suppose the classic purist might take it to pieces, discovering a variety of faults. Let him do so. In doing it he will miss Lillian altogether—her beauty and the magic of it. It has often been likened to music, the strains of Debussy, which is well enough, as far as it goes, and I have found it in the heart cry of Mascagni's "Intermezzo," in the "Eve of St. Agnes," in the dying fall of the "Londonderry Air." To say that it is spiritual only partly tells the story. It is that, but it is something more. It has a haunting eerie quality that has to do with elfland, and lonely moors—





*Steichen*

"CAMILLE"

*Courtesy of Vanity Fair*



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the face that seen by the homing lad at evening leaves him forever undone. Scores of men and women, too, have written of it, have felt its strangeness. Some have tried to write of it lightly, but underneath you feel the magic working. They have glimpsed "Diana's silver horn," and are forever changed.

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## VII

### A FEW NOTES

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IN my notebook of this time I find these entries:

*March 31, 1931:* She has returned from a brief stay at Atlantic City. "I read 'Arrowsmith,'" she said. "I think it a fine book.

"I remembered something while I was there: something from my childhood: I remembered Papa taking Dorothy and me there, once; I think we stayed there over-night. I know we paddled in the water on the beach. How strange, when my memory is so poor, that this should come back to me, after all these years. I think we went from New York, so it must have been just after Baltimore, when I was about five."

*No date:* How tolerant she is! Whatever her belief or habits, she never urges them upon others, or tries to disintegrate theirs. She never smoked a cigarette in her life, but for years she has lived in a drift of tobacco, without objection or criticism. She drinks nothing stronger than mild wine, but provides generously for her guests.

*April 5:* Artists are always wanting to paint Lillian. Just now she is posing for Sorine, the distinguished Russian painter who did the Pavlowa which hangs in the Luxembourg. Lillian's portrait is to hang there, he says, and some day in the Louvre. I saw it today, with her. It is vividly, delicately done.

*No date:* Today she said: "I attended a symphony concert, last night, with some friends. In the box with us was Gabrilowitsch. I thought of what the music meant to him

that it did not mean to me. What he heard that missed me entirely. Musicians have an entire world of their own. No other art has that in the same degree. Science has it, I suppose. But music seems different,—of a world still farther removed.”

*April 15:* How does she find time for all the things she does? She has no secretary, now, yet somehow keeps up conscientiously with her letter answering—of itself a heavy task. Then, home duties, social demands, this posing every day for Sorine; also, for a young German girl, *Fräulein von Bismarck*; reading plays; this work of ours, which takes no end of time, and thought. I don't see how she manages it all—but she does.

I suppose things trouble her, but she remains serene. There is about her a detachment from the worries of life that suggests Karma Yoga, and is that, I have no doubt, for she is versed in Eastern Philosophy.

Whether she “suffers fools gladly,” or not, I do not know. I only know that she suffers them—without complaint.

She reads omnivorously, but always, as I think, seeking the best, and apparently reading with care and reflection.

A few days ago I lent her Brand Whitlock's latest book, “*Narcissus*,” which tells a Belgian legend of Van Dyck. Today she said: “I read it twice—for the story, first, then for the beauty of it—the style. It has great charm. I want to read it again.” Then she told me a story of Van Dyck and Frans Hals, which somewhere she had read, or heard.

*April, 1932.* Something has happened, or is in the process of happening. Since the conclusion of “*Uncle Vanya*” Lillian has given little serious consideration to theatrical

matters, putting aside as unsuitable a variety of offered parts. A new prospect now presents itself—one that appeals to her taste and imagination: a group of influential citizens of Denver, Colorado, headed by Mr. Delos Chappell, propose to refurbish and reopen the ancient Opera House of the little “ghost mining town” of Central City, with a week’s presentation of “Camille,” at fancy prices, for the benefit of the University of Denver. Robert Edmond Jones is to stage and direct the production, with Lillian as Casting Director, herself in the title rôle. She is deeply interested—has secured Raymond Hackett for the part of Armand, the rehearsing to begin at once.

From a special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Denver, Col., July 16.—In an impressive ceremony, amid the merry laughter of “pioneer” belles and gay young men, and at a cost of \$250,000, the famous Central City Opera House was brought to life tonight after a silence of fifty years.

Men, women and children from the Atlantic Seaboard and the Pacific Coast came to this “phantom” village, once the miners’ capital. Daughters and sons, granddaughters and grandsons of pioneers who once made those same walls vibrate with their applause were there for the gala opening of the revival, in dress such as their ancestors wore at the theatre when it was new. Some of the gowns, handed down through the fifty years, were once heard to rustle down those same aisles. Every person in the audience represented some famous character of the time when Central City was the centre of Colorado’s gold mining industry. “Camille” typified to perfection the taste of the ’80s in the theatre.

Miss Lillian Gish, as Marguerite Gautier, takes the leading rôle, with Raymond Hackett playing opposite her as Armand. It was the first time “Camille” has played in the old opera house in fifty years.

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## VIII

### L' ENVOI

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AND so, at last, the plowman, turning the furrows of life, comes to the boundary that divides the known from the unknown—the wilderness from the sown field. Whatever we may one day find beyond, is already there in every detail—only, I lack the clairvoyant gift, and turn for a brief backward glimpse. It is no vision of artistic triumph that comes to me tonight . . . not the memory of Chekhov's radiant heroine . . . not the triste picture of that broken flower of the Limehouse . . . something even more real than these: a real child, trouping with wandering players, away from a mother's care . . . a slim-legged little girl, who slept on station benches and telegraph tables, who running across a foot-bridge lost her poor possessions in the swift black water, who from a train or hotel window stared silently into the night.

“What are you looking at, Lillian?”

“Nothing, Aunt Alice, just looking.”







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